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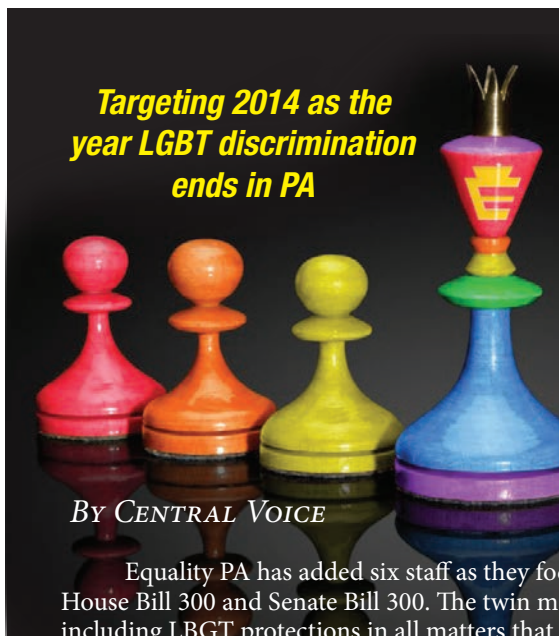

Equality PA Beefs Up for Battle

Targeting 2014 as the year LGBT discrimination ends in PA

By Central Voice

Equality PA has added six staff as they focus for 2014 on House Bill 300 and Senate Bill 300. The twin measures call for including LBGT protections in all matters that involve public accommodations - employment, housing, credit, and public all accommodations.

The organization's web site says they are "ready to kick off our campaign to make 2014 the year we end LGBT discrimination in PA."

A bipartisan slate of more than 100 Pennsylvania legislators has introduced the "300" legislation. Although 33 cities and towns have municipal ordinances already in place protecting LGBT individuals from discrimination, statewide legislation is critical to ensuring that all Pennsylvanians are protected.

Of the State Senators and State Representative who represent the Dauphin, Cumberland, Lancaster and York county region, a few have signed on as co-sponsors to the bill. Many more have not.

Co-sponsors are State Sen. Rob Teplitz, State Rep. Patty Kim, State Rep. Mike Sturla, and State Rep. Ron Miller.

Not co-sponsoring are area State Reps. Aument, Bear, Boyd, Creighten, Cutler, Denlinger, Hickernell, and area State Senators Alloway, Brubaker, Gillespie, Grove, Fulmer, Regan, Saylor, Smucker, Schreiber, Vance, Waugh, and Tallman.

"New staff will mount a statewide effort," says Jane Slusser, who manages the newly-placed organizing team.

Organizers will focus on Harrisburg, Scranton, south East Pennsylvania, including Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh and surrounding areas. One of the organizers will work with faith-based groups across the state.

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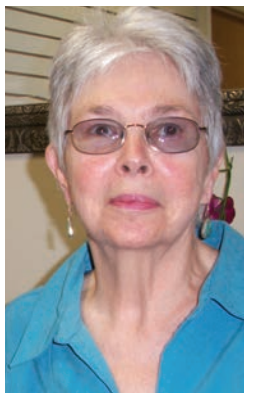
Update: Same-sex Inheritance Tax Challenge

By Central Voice

Nancy Nixon may wait "until June at the earliest" for a decision on her challenge to Pennsylvania's Inheritance Tax as it applies to same-sex marriages.

"We found out that the Department of Revenue Board of Appeals is six months behind in issuing determinations. So that means we won't get a determination on my challenge to the Inheritance Tax until June at the earliest," Nixon wrote in an email.



Nancy Nixon

Last issue (Jan-Feb 2014) *Central Voice* chronicled the legal challenge by Nancy Nixon that same-sex couples, because they're marriage is not recognized in Pennsylvania, must pay a 15% Inheritance Tax when a partner dies.

Nixon and her partner Jeanne Schartz, now deceased, lived together for 31-years as a couple, both publically and privately. They did not brag. Neither did they apologize. Anyone who knew them with even minor depth recognized them as a loving, committed couple. Still, under current rules, Nixon must pay the stiff Inheritance Tax.

Nixon is asking that the state recognize her 31-year relationship to Schwartz as a common-law marriage. The bottom line is that if recognized as a common-law marriage, Nixon would not have to pay $21,000 in taxes, a tax that does not apply to opposite sex marriages or relationships recognized as common-law.

Nixon is represented by Attorney Cindy Villanella in her challenge to Penn-

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Analysis: Republican Support for Minimum Wage Hike

By Frank Pizzoli

When State Rep. Patty Kim (Dauphin-D) introduced House Bill 1896 she chose to make her hourly wage announcement at Harrisburg's YWCA, surrounded by women who would benefit from the increased wage and have a decent chance at economic independence.

Kim said last November her first major statewide legislative initiative would be efforts to increase the state's minimum wage. Her Harrisburg-based House District ranks 10th of 203 statewide in the percentage of households living in poverty.

"I believe that support for a minimum wage increase is about to reach its tipping point," Kim told *Central Voice*. "The gap be-

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State Rep. Patty Kim (Dauphin-D) made the hourly wage increase announcement at Harrisburg's YWCA, surrounded by women who would benefit from the increased wage and have a decent chance at economic independence.

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Political Update

Pittsburgh City Council President Gay

Bruce Kraus was selected city council president by the nine-member council. He is openly gay. In 2008, Kraus became the first openly-gay person elected to council. He was re-elected in 2012. His tenure has been marked by several gay-related municipal reforms, including the Domestic Partner Registry and a recent requirement for city contractors to offer domestic partner benefits to their employees. He was a leading presence in response to an assault on two queer women of color in his district in 2013 and has served on numerous boards and committees.

Kraus assisted with event permitting and providing police presence at the Pittsburgh Dyke and Trans March.

Equality Texas' PAC Backs Republican

In a sign of growing bipartisan support for LGBT rights in the Lone Star State, Equality Texas' PAC has endorsed a Republican legislative candidate for the first time in its history. Incumbent state Rep. Sarah Davis, R-Houston faces a right-wing challenger in the Republican Primary in House District 134. Davis, who was first elected in 2010 and defeated gay Democrat Ann Johnson in 2012, has been an outspoken supporter of LGBT equality. Davis authored legislation to ensure equal hospital visitation and medical decision-making, and she helped defeat an effort to ban LGBT resource centers on college campuses. She also happens to be the lone House Republican who voted against Texas' strict new abortion regulations. "The majority of Republicans agree with most of our legislative priorities," said Texas Equity PAC volunteer Daniel Williams. "We have to make it safe for Republican representatives to be out front on those issues. Rep. Davis has done that and she's facing a primary opponent who is decidedly anti-equality.

New York Seeks 'Gay Conversion' Ban

Gay-rights advocates and their legislative allies are making a push this year to ban so-called gay conversion therapy in New York, in hopes that a similar move by New Jersey Republican Gov. Chris Christie provides momentum. "Gay conversion therapy" refers to efforts by mental-health professionals to change a person's sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual through psychological treatment sessions.

The practice is banned for minors in California and New Jersey and has been condemned by the American Psychiatric Association. Opposition to the bans has been strong in some evangelical Christian communities. A bill attempting to ban the practice for minors in New York was proposed last year by state Sen. Brad Hoylman, a Manhattan Democrat, but it didn't get a vote. Mr. Hoylman has reintroduced his bill with amendments.

FL Biz Wants Anti-discrimination Laws

Florida big business wants gays added to anti-discrimination laws. A coalition that includes Disney World, railway giant CSX, health insurer Florida Blue, Wells Fargo, Florida Fortune 500 companies Tech Data and Darden Restaurants have announced their support for a law adding sex orientation and gender identity to state anti-discrimination laws. Similar legislation has been filed in the state Legislature for at least eight years, but has never gone anywhere, said one sponsor of the bill, Rep. Holly Raschein, D-Key Largo. She said the business support could make a difference. "In my dozen years in this process, I've never seen a powerful coalition like that form," Raschein said.

A prominent opponent, however, said the bill still faces an uphill climb in the Legislature, although he conceded support for gay rights has been growing. "There's no doubt that through the media and Hollywood they've made progress on swaying a lot of opinion on this ... I have no doubt they're picking up more sympathizers," said state Rep. Dennis Baxley, R-Ocala, a leading Christian conservative legislator. But, Baxley said, "Among the people that have to make the hiring and firing decisions in daily life, I think there's still a broad discussion that has to be held. "We're feeling the pressure that we're supposed to change our moral view and that's quite a challenging dialog to have."

GOPround Co-founder Quits

GOPround co-founder Jimmy LaSalvia said it all on Twitter: "It's time to focus my energy to help make our country better instead of trying to fix a dysfunction political party whose days are numbered." He says he's fed up with the "tolerance of bigotry" in Republican party. LaSalvia is leaving the GOP. LaSalvia said in a blog post that he changed his voter registration to "no party", because the Republican party had "lost its way". He joined the ranks of unaffiliated voters saying "I am every bit as conservative as I've always been, but I just can't bring myself to carry the Republican label any longer. You see, I just don't agree with the big-government 'conservatives' who run the party now. The other reason I am leaving is the tolerance of bigotry in the GOP. The current leadership lacks the courage to stand up to it – I'm not sure they ever will."

Social Security to Pay Benefits Claims

Social Security Administration to pay some same-sex couples' benefits claims The Social Security Administration announced Monday that it will begin processing some benefits claims for same-sex couples following June's Supreme Court ruling on the Defense of Marriage Act. "Social Security is processing some widow's and widower's claims by surviving members of same-sex marriages and paying benefits where they are due," Acting Commissioner of Social Security Carolyn Colvin said in a statement. "Our goal is to treat all Americans with dignity and respect."

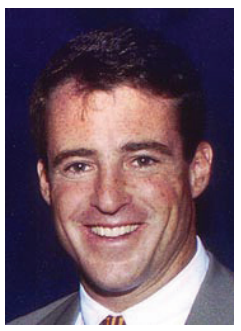
Gay GOPers Seek House seats

Chuck Colbert reports no Republican candidate has ever been openly gay when first elected to the House of Representatives. No openly gay Republicans have served in Congress since Jim Kolbe of Arizona retired in 2006. And in Massachusetts, the GOP has not won a House seat since 1994. But, Colbert writes, that political status quo is likely to be tested again as openly gay Richard Tisei announced his candidacy in the Massachusetts 6th Congressional District.
This is Tisei's second run for the House. Two years ago, he came within 1 percentage point of ousting longtime, eight-term incumbent Representative John Tierney (D) of Salem. Tisei's campaign will focus on the themes of lower taxes, limited government, personal responsibility, and freedom. He also said, "Obamacare is the biggest expansion of government in our lifetime," causing "millions to lose their health care coverage and left millions more with fewer choices and higher premiums. Two other openly gay Republicans, in New Hampshire and southern California, hope to win House seats this year.

U.S. Customs to Recognize Same-sex Couples as Families

Same-sex couples will be recognized as families while going through the customs declaration process in the U.S., under a final rule submitted Friday by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The rule allows long-term same-sex couples as well as residents and international visitors to file a joint customs declaration upon entering the U.S. Officials believe the change will "more accurately reflect relationships for U.S. citizens, residents and international visitors who are traveling together as a family."

MD, DE to Recognize Utah Marriages; Protect Transgender



Maryland Attorney General Doug Gansler has said his state would recognize same-sex marriages performed in Utah. Gansler is currently running to succeed Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley. "Maryland will continue to recognize valid out-of-state same-sex marriages as we continue to strengthen the Constitution's promise of equal protection under the law," said Gansler. Delaware Attorney General Beau Biden has also said his state will recognize same-sex marriages performed in Utah.

MD State Sen. Rich Madaleno (D-Montgomery County) has introduced banning discrimination against transgender Marylanders. State Sens. Brian Frosh (D-Montgomery County), the chair of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee who is running for attorney general, and Robert Zirkin (D-Baltimore County) are among the 25 senators who have co-sponsored the measure. State Del. Luke Clippinger (D-Baltimore City) plans to bring forth the bill in the House of Delegates where it passed in 2011.

6 Couples & Equality Florida Lawsuit

Six same-sex couples and Equality Florida Institute have filed a lawsuit in Florida state court in Miami seeking the freedom to marry. The lawsuit argues that Florida's laws barring same-sex couples from marriage violate the United States Constitution by denying them the legal protections and equal dignity that having the freedom to marry provides. The couples are from Miami and the surrounding area. Four of the couples are raising children, and another couple has an adult child and two grandchildren.

Northern Cyprus Abolishes Punishment

The parliament of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has abolished the Criminal Code provisions which punished consensual sexual acts between adult males with five years of imprisonment.

"We welcome today's vote and can finally call Europe a continent completely free from laws criminalising homosexuality," Paulo Côrte-Real, Co-Chair of ILGA-Europe's executive Board, said. "In 1981, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in its historic judgment in Dudgeon v UK case that such laws are in breach of the European Human Rights Convention and must be abolished. It took Europe 33 years to completely free the continent from these unjust and discriminatory laws."

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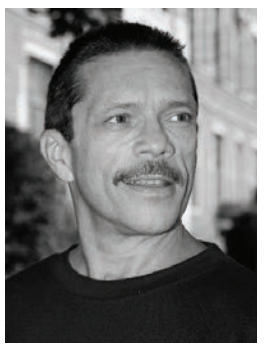
publisher's voice

Support Equality PA, They Support *You*

By Frank Pizzoli



Pennsylvania's U.S. Senator Arlen Specter used say campaigning in the state was like covering six different countries. He had no "single bullet" theory for his own electoral territory.

Equality Pa must be having the same experience. As the statewide organization prepares to cover the Commonwealth with the addition of six new community organizers, it must seem to them like a handful of different nations.

These busy staff will focus for 2014 on House Bill 300 and Senate Bill 300.

The twin measures call for including LBGT protections in all matters that involve public accommodations - employment, housing, credit, and public all accommodations. The organization's web site says they are "ready to kick off our campaign to make 2014 the year we end LGBT discrimination in PA."

A bipartisan slate of more than 100 Pennsylvania legislators has introduced the "300" legislation.

According to recent polls, 72% of Pennsylvanians support the goals of the legislation. University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, the largest employer in the state, has endorsed the bill.

This effort represents a moment when opponents of lgbt civil rights will know our community was involved by the body count. Donations are important too but the number of individuals who answer Equality PAQ's call for volunteers will create the much coveted "tipping point" that all social justice movements must achieve before the walls of oppression crumble.

Now is not the time for *only* checkbook activism. For the normally conservative state house and Senate to even think about movement on your basic civil rights, they need to see you're there in your behalf. Elected officials from each of the unique sections of your region need to hear from you as a constituent. Don't let them use your tax dollars to keep the legislative machinery from working in your behalf.

The LGBT community and its allies are not seeking "special" rights. We seek basic human rights. The right not to be fired because of who we love. The right to public accommodations in the same way others are included. That's not so special, not so radical. Your presence at a volunteer evening will make all the difference in the world, your world. Go to equalitypa.org and find the meeting nearest you under Events.

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voice box

OMG

OMG! What a wonderful story about everything. I really appreciate your detail and memory of what I told *Central Voice* about my experience hanging around Keith Haring. I'm going to ring the bells loudly with this article. *(Keith Haring Legacy Strong As Ever, Jan-Feb 2014)*

Karey Maurice

THANK YOU

Thank you, *Central Voice!* What a beautiful story!
(Rep. Kim Wants Higher Minimum Wage, Refuses Automatic Raise, Jan-Feb 2014)

Eric Gutshall, chief of staff, Rep. Patty Kim

APPRECIATE

Thanks so much, *Central Voice!* Great articles! We really appreciate all the promotion you give the Art Association of Harrisburg.

Carrie Wissler Thomas, executive director, Art Association of Hbg

GREAT ISSUE

Looks like another great issue. *(Jan-Feb 2014)*

Mike Long, author, Elizabethtown College

REACH OUT

Nice! Thanks so much, *Central Voice.* Appreciate your reaching out.

Elaine Labalme, communications manager, Penn Future

E-mail your thoughts to Central VOICE posops@aol.com

community voice

'Protest beer' Mocks Russia's Anti-gay Laws

'Protest beer' mocking anti-gay laws in Russia was sent Feb. 4 to Russian president Vladimir Putin.

A Scottish craft brewery believe they have launched the world's first 'protest beer', produced to fight against homophobic legislation. BrewDog's new craft beer, Hello My Name is Vladimir, is a double IPA ale containing Limmonick berries - an ingredient regarded by some Russians to enhance sexual performance in men.

The bottle is styled with a gaudy Andy Warhol-style label showing an image of the Russian president wearing lipstick and eyeshadow. 'We sincerely hope that when Vladimir Putin is tired from a busy day riding horses with his top off, grappling with burly men on the Judo mat or fishing in his Speedos, he reclines on a velvet chaise longue and has one of his handsome helpers wet his whistle with a glass of Hello My Name is Vladimir,' said BrewDog co-founder James Watt.

your voice

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John Hanger for Governor Committee, PO Box 4068, Harrisburg, PA 17111, David Rolka - Treasurer

Legalize and Tax Marijuana Now - Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate john Hanger recently began displaying billboards that say " Legalize and Tax Marijuana Now!" The billboards are located in Erie, I-79 S near 26th, Scranton I-81 N near Drinker.

community voice

The True Cost of Minimum Wage

by Elizabeth Stelle & John R. Bouder

Across the country, interest groups are pushing to increase the mandated minimum wage to $10 or $15 per hour, ostensibly to help low-income workers at fast food chains and big box stores. But if a higher minimum wage benefits workers, why not push it to $20 or $30 or even higher? Because experience shows minimum wage increases actually hurt the very workers they aim to help - particularly young minorities.

Joe Olivo can attest to that reality. As a second generation owner of a small printing business in New Jersey, he employs workers who start at minimum wage. New Jersey voters recently approved a one dollar increase in the minimum wage that went into effect January 1, raising it to $8.25 per hour.

In a recent phone interview, Olivo told the Commonwealth Foundation that many people don't understand the cumulative effect each small increase has on economic growth and the unemployment rate. Any increase impacts his business - he's even had to lay off employees because of increasing labor costs. "It's not just those people getting minimum wage that get a raise," Olivo said, "it affects my whole wage bracket."

The sad truth is, the minimum wage is one of the best ways to put low-skilled workers out of a job.

Today, minimum wage workers are mostly teens, and the jobless rate for 16 to 19-year-olds has steadily increased as the minimum wage has risen. Further increases will only continue that trend.

Even more concerning is the impact on young minorities. In states like Pennsylvania, which saw minimum wage hikes from 2007 to 2009, more black young adults lost their jobs as a direct result of minimum wage increases than the recession. The result? According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, black youth unemployment sits at an astonishing 36 percent nationwide - double the rate of white youths and nearly 30 points higher than the general unemployment rate.

Raising the minimum wage will price more young people out of entry-level jobs that help them gain experience - effectively sawing off the first rung of the ladder to their prosperity.

As an anti-poverty program, the minimum wage fails miserably, because few breadwinners actually earn it. Only 10.5 percent of an increased minimum wage goes to poor, working families. In fact, fewer workers overall are making minimum wage. In 1979, 8 percent of workers made the minimum wage; by 2011 it had fallen to just 3 percent.

In essence, the minimum wage feeds the cycle of poverty by forcing low-skilled workers out of jobs. A better approach to combating the major cause of poverty—unemployment—would be reducing the cost of hiring through lowering taxes on employers and enacting health care reform that truly brings costs down.

Olivo's small business serves as a good example. Asked about a $15 minimum wage, he responded, "I can't even imagine. I couldn't make that up in raising prices. It would lead to layoffs and me looking at using more automation, at least I can control that cost."

Why layoffs? Businesses don't turn a profit every year. Mandated cost increases force them to find places to cut expenses or raise prices for consumers.

So who gains from raising the minimum wage? Politicians and labor unions. Minimum wage increases tip the balance in favor of higher-skilled - and higher-wage - unionized workers by raising the floor from which they negotiate compensation.

Politicians, on the other hand, can act like they did something for the little guy while receiving union support - which is no small matter. In 2012 alone, government union SEIU Local 668 spent more than $200,000 of its members' dues on political activity and lobbying.

For Joe Olivo and entrepreneurs everywhere, a higher minimum wage would be one more government-imposed hurdle to overcome. "It's not just the increase in minimum wage, but health care costs are going up, taxes are going up - it's just one more thing that makes it harder to do business."

Lawmakers should be making it easier for small businesses to hire new workers seeking to climb the ladder of success - not adding another entry to the laundry list of obstacles to growth and prosperity.

Elizabeth Stelle and John R. Bouder are policy analysts at the Commonwealth Foundation (CommonwealthFoundation.org), Pennsylvania's free-market think tank.

Time for HRC to Put Economic Justice on the Gay Agenda

By Michael Petrelis
The Petrelis Files

The head of the Human Rights Campaign – Chad Griffin – is one damn smart cookie, and I wish he would put his brain to work with corporations to address economic justice issues for LGBT Americans.

There's been plenty of sucking up to the business community at the HRC, and little focus on money matters affecting low- and moderate-income LGBT people.

On Monday, Dec. 30, the lead story in The New York Timeswas about Democratic Party leaders and 2014 congressional candidates gearing up for raising the minimum wage as an campaign issue:

Democrats prize the issue of a minimum wage increase because it would help address income inequality, which is galvanizing liberals at the moment and is popular with swing voters they will need in this year's elections.

Sixty-four percent of independents, and even 57 percent of Republicans, said they supported increasing the minimum wage, according to a CBS News poll last month. Some 70 percent of self-described "moderates" said they also supported an increase.

That 57 percent figure for the GOP's support of making the minimum wage more realistic startled me.

Earlier this month, I tried to elicit a statement from HRC leaders about economic justice concerns within the gay community, and all I got was silence.

Why can't the HRC, the gay division of the Democratic Party, address such concerns?

Is it's because of the robust six-figure salaries of the top HRC executives? Do such compensation amounts cut off their awareness of gays who don't make that kind of money?

Or is it because the minimum wage increase doesn't attract the attention of celebrities who appear at HRC dinners?

Thanks to the CBS News poll and the The New York Times, I know where many Republicans stand on increasing the minimum wage, versus the silence from the HRC.

Just a reminder to readers about the compensation packages at our largest political advocacy organization, here is how much HRC's top-ten executives made last year, according to their 2013 IRS 990 filing:

Chad Griffin, President, started on June 11, 2012, at a base salary of $250,000, including a $20,000 incentive bonus, with an additional $50,000 bonus for an unstated reason, and $40,100 gross-up payment, for a total of $360,100.

Joe Solmonese, executive director through June 29, 2012, base salary of $238,300 plus $39,000 gross-up payment for a total of $277,300.

James Rinefierd, treasurer, base salary of $211,500 plus $64,000 gross-up payment for a total of $275,500.

Cathy Nelson, assistant vice president: $275,000.

Susanne Salkind, vice president, base salary of $212,700 plus $60,000 gross-up payment for a total of $272,700.

David M. Smith, vice president of programs: $250,300.

Fred Sainz, vice president of communications: $228,000.

Robert Falk, secretary, base salary of $166,500 plus $50,000 gross-up payment for a total of $216,500.

Allison Herwitt, legislative director: $197,500.

Ann Crowley, membership director: $175,000.

While HRC's leaders are mum on increasing the minimum wage, an examination of their six most current IRS tax filings (available on their website) reveals there is one thing they very much are in favor of — giving themselves annual raises.

Will HRC make 2014 the year in which they address economic justice concerns such as a living wage, unemployment benefits and food stamps that are crucial to the safety net for millions of LGBT Americans? Yes, it could happen if enough of us demand it of the organization.

Let HRC know these concerns are on our collective "gay agenda."

Michael Petrelis is a veteran human rights activist living with HIV. For more, visit his blog The Petrelis Files.

your voice

Gay Son Speaks Out

Chris Smith

Bil Browning, of Bilerico Project, reports that the gay son of Indiana anti-gay Representative Milo Smith spoke out recently:

"Hello everyone. I am the gay son of Representative Milo Smith, chairman of the Elections Committee that just passed HJR-3 onto the full House. I'm not here to badmouth my dad. I'm terribly disappointed in his decision and beliefs, but he's not going to change them now if he hasn't after all these years of knowing I am gay. I am here to support you and my friends who remain in Indiana. They are my extended family."
- Chris Smith, the openly gay son of Indiana Republican legislator Milo Smith, writing on the Indiana Equality Facebook page.

Representative Smith just pushed a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage and civil unions through his committee last week. Yes, he voted against his own son's civil rights; there is no creature as despicable as someone who would actively harm his own child. Is it any wonder that his son doesn't live in Indiana any longer?

Addressing Inequality

By Alan Kennedy-Shaffer

"Families are always rising and falling in America," Martin Scorsese's character Billy Costigan intones in "The Departed." But are they? The gap between rich and poor has risen, median inflation-adjusted income has fallen, the minimum wage has fallen behind, and access to higher education increasingly separates those who can afford it from those who cannot. President Barack Obama, recognizing the need to create more economic opportunities for the majority of Americans struggling to survive, recently called addressing inequality the "defining challenge of our time."

This year's State of the Union address featured an astute attack by Obama on rising inequality:

"Today, after four years of economic growth, corporate profits and stock prices have rarely been higher, and those at the top have never done better. But average wages have barely budged. Inequality has deepened. Upward mobility has stalled. The cold, hard fact is that even in the midst of recovery, too many Americans are working more than ever just to get by; let alone to get ahead. And too many still aren't working at all."

While our nation's economic recovery has spawned a new generation of industry titans and the Dow Jones has jumped above 15,000, the fruits have skewed dramatically toward the rich. Six in ten Americans are worried about losing their jobs, according to the Washington Post. More unemployed Americans are abandoning the job search after coming up empty. A majority of Americans are currently dissatisfied with the way income and wealth are distributed in the United States, according to Gallup. Nearly as many Americans identify as lower class as middle class. In short, a lot more families in America are falling than rising. That must change.

It is unacceptable that the top 1% takes more than 20%, and the top 10% takes more than 50%, of all national income, the highest disparity recorded in a century, according to economists Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Piketty. It is unacceptable that a child born into the bottom 20% income level has less than a 1-in-20 chance of making it to the top 20%, as President Obama has noted. It is unacceptable that Americans with parents' income in the top 25% are four times as likely to get a bachelor's degree than the bottom 75%. Even former Sen. Rick Santorum warned that mobility "up into the middle income is actually greater…in Europe, than it is in America."

Will we reverse the trend? Will we revive America's place as the land of opportunity for all? President Obama took the first step toward income equality by promising to sign an executive order to raise the minimum wage for federal contract workers from $7.25 to $10.10. Stymied by Republicans in Congress unwilling to allow a single mother earning the minimum wage forty hours a week, fifty-two weeks a year, to rise above the poverty level, Obama is finally looking beyond Congress to state and local legislators in a nationwide push to raise the minimum wage. Obama should also strengthen union rights and fight harder for options for tax-starved cities.

Here in Pennsylvania, a growing number of state legislators support raising the state minimum wage from $7.25 to $10.10, but face opposition from the Koch brothers, American Legislative Exchange Council, and other lobbyists for the richest of the rich. From President George W. Bush's trillion-dollar tax boondoggle to Enron to derivatives to Wall Street deregulation, the elephant in the room is all too frequently the elephant. Republicans bent on ensuring that people, not corporations, pay taxes, while only their most well-heeled friends have access to good jobs, healthcare, voting rights, and education, are succeeding in making the middle class disappear.

President Obama hit the nail on the head when he said that "the power of our vote, not the size of our bank account, [should] drive our democracy." While legislative answers to rising inequality include raising the minimum wage, permitting fair taxation and regionalization, protecting labor rights, ending all discrimination on the basis of both gender and sexual orientation, and giving a hand up to those who those who need it most rather than a handout to corporations, the key to legislative success lies in public financing, term limits, and access to the ballot box. To win the war on poverty, we must win both the war for our democracy and the war against inequality.

That is the challenge which defines our time. Now is the time to address inequality.

Alan Kennedy-Shaffer lives in Harrisburg and writes about politics for Central Voice.

Same-sex Inheritance *cont'd from pg 1*

sylvania's tax rule which is the responsibility of the state Department of Revenue to execute.

"The suit seeks to have the state revoke the death tax of 15% imposed on the estate of her late partner, Jeanne Schwartz," Villanella explained. Currently, Pennsylvania defines marriage as between "one man and one woman," a measure signed into law in 1996 by then-Governor Tom Ridge, who now supports same-sex marriage. When the US Supreme Court was deciding on California's Proposition 8, Ridge signed an amicus curiae brief asking the court to support same-sex marriage.

By Louie Marven
Executive Director
LGBT Community Center Coalition of Central PA

Ragen Chastain Addresses Body Image at Summit

On February 21 and 22, the center held the 7th annual Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Leadership Summit at Dickinson College. This conference for high school and college students and staff is a collaborative effort with Planned Parenthood Keystone and Dickinson College's Offices of Diversity Initiatives and LGBTQ Services.

The event, taking place over a two-day period for the third time in its seven-year history, features a keynote speaker, workshop sessions, lunch, and networking. This year's keynote speaker was Ragen Chastain, a trained researcher, three-time national dance champion, and AFAA-certified fitness professional who writes and speaks about self-esteem, body image, and health at every size. Chastain's address, "Queer Bodies Great and Small," encouraged participants to be proud of their bodies no matter what the size, and to create inclusive and welcoming gay-straight alliance student clubs.

Inviting Chastain to give the keynote address came from the planning committee's reflection on the 2013 Summit, in which workshops dealing with healthy body image for LGBTQ young people brought much discussion during the conference, especially at the closing sessions. Participants were clearly interested in hearing more about the intersections between body image and LGBTQ status, and as a self-identified queer, fat speaker and activist, Chastain's message resonated with this goal.

Body image researchers are becoming increasingly aware of how negative body image, including disordered eating, impacts LGBTQ people; for example the National Eating Disorder Association reports that men identifying as gay in research were 5% of the total male population, but among men who have eating disorders, 42% identify as gay. Clearly, the 2013 GSA Leadership Summit attendees who spoke up about the importance of discussing body image were identifying a need to overlap the push for self-acceptance and communal acceptance in the LGBTQ and body positive movements.

In addition to hearing from Chastain, participants attended three workshop sessions per day, choosing between five different options during each time session. Workshop selections included Hazing and Bullying 101; Trans* Youth Policy Briefing and Advocacy Training; "Queer"ing Leadership: Leading with a Rainbow Lens; Know Your Rights: A Guide to the Legal Issues Impacting LGBT High School Students; and an Advisor Roundtable.

The Summit is an opportunity for students and professionals to participate in workshops designed to help everyone better understand and advocate for LGBTQA youth in central PA and beyond. The GSA Leadership Summit is the only event of its kind in central PA, where LGBTQA students and professionals have day-long safe spaces to network, learn new skills, and work toward making central Pennsylvania a more welcoming place for all people.

The mission of the LGBT Center of Central PA is to create common ground for the LGBT community and allies in central Pennsylvania by providing services through educational, cultural, and community activities that foster wholeness.

Petition Calls for Equal Benefits for Married Veterans

The American Military Partner Association recently launched an online petition calling on the U.S. Attorney General to direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to stop excluding married gay and lesbian veterans from many VA benefits simply because they are married to someone of the same gender. After six months of review following the Supreme Court's decision in the Windsor case, legally married gay and lesbian veterans are still waiting for access to the same benefits as their straight counterparts, the benefits they have earned in serving our nation.

Mexican Supreme Court Upholds Equal Public Benefits

Couples are winning the right to marry in courts throughout Mexico, but they are still fighting to get access to all the rights that entails. The Mexican Supreme Court has ruled that the ministry overseeing pensions and health benefits must give same-sex couples who are married or registered under state civil union laws all the same benefits of opposite-sex couples. The ruling specifically addressed the question of whether someone whose spouse dies is entitled to survivor's benefits under Mexico's Social Security law, which includes pensions and access to medical services. The case was initially brought by a couple who were refused the right to enroll in full spousal benefits, but one of them died before the case was decided.

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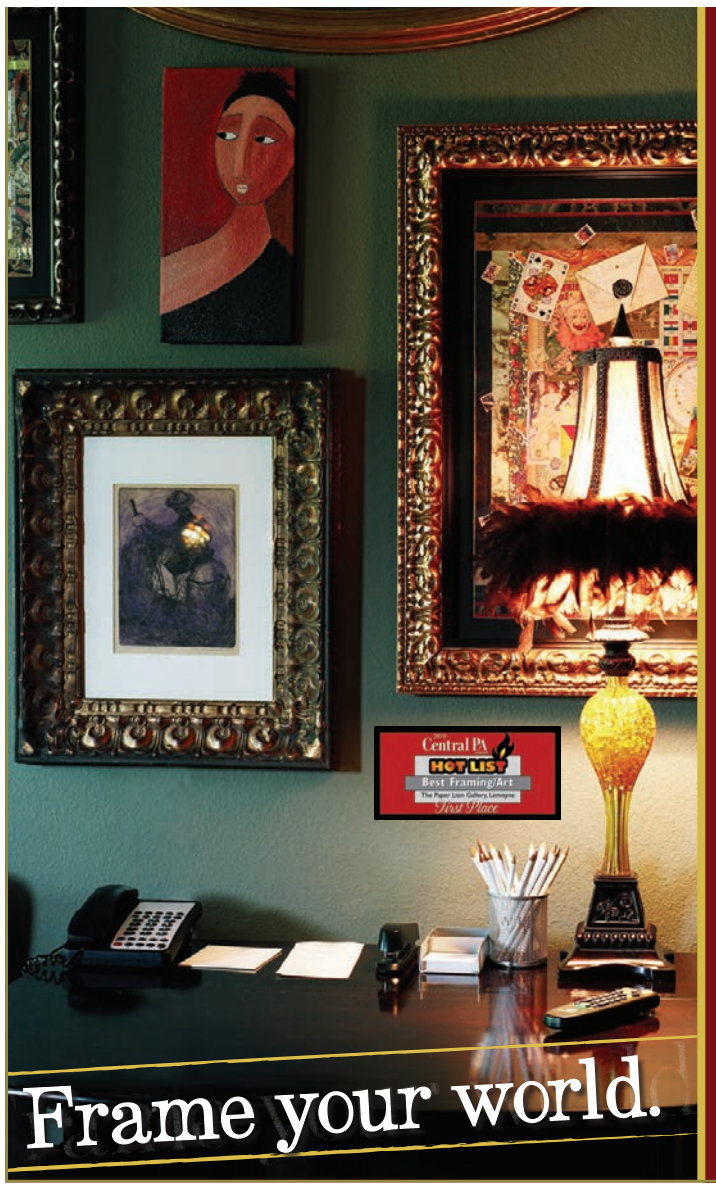

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Stuart Landon at the helm.

Midtown Cinema: Digital and Friendly

By Central Voice

With the digital transition at Midtown Cinema complete, the popular independent film venue is poised to grow deep roots into the region's arts and entertainment foundation.

The good news is that the familiar matinee crowd, usually 35-40 and above, has returned. Seats are usually filled for the 3 p.m. or so screenings.

The other good news is that management is adding a twist to programming - entertainment for a younger crowd, high school, college, and 20-something.

Cinema now fully digital

"We've evolved into a twin demographic. Our faithful matinee moviegoers are back in strength. And we have new programming for a younger audience," Stuart Landon tells *Central Voice*. Landon, Director of Community Engagement, is responsible for audience development and marketing the upgraded facility. He co-manages the facility with Adam Porter, Director of Operations.

For example, on 3rd in the Burg nights in Harrisburg, the third Friday of each month, the cinema offers special screenings that are also BYOB. Landon also adds Improv to film by screening schlocky B films with live improvised comedy.

Adam Porter, Director of Operations

An innovation introduced at the theatre is an annual membership for $35.

"Very quickly after offering an annual membership we had 200+ people snatch them up," Landon explains. The membership entitles the holder to $5 tickets for all screenings.

The Express Ticket Purchase has provided a smoother experience.

"We're 21st Century. Slide your debit or credit card, sign right on the screen and you're done!" Landon says.

Info: Midtown Cinema, 250 Reily St., Harrisburg, PA 17102, 717-909-6566; http://midtowncinema.com

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Cassidy with the coffee, tea, beverage selections.

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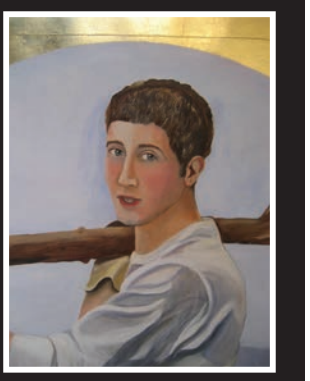

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Analysis: Minimum Wage Hike *continued from page one*

tween the haves and have-nots is shockingly apparent," she notes, citing former Secretary of Labor and Industry and economist Robert Reich who points out that the top 400 richest Americans have more wealth than the bottom 150 million people combined. "We should be outraged of the unequal distribution of wealth," Kim said.

Amber Hollibaugh, Queers for Economic Justice, recently told *Central Voice*, "It makes me insane, because this idea that all LGBT people are wealthy, and mostly white is a dangerous myth," she said. There were 46.5 million people living in poverty in 2012. That means about 1.4 million of them were in the gay community.

Although a wage hike is an uphill fight in the Republican-controlled state Capitol, there are Republicans - some of whom are admired by Pennsylvania Republicans - who favor a wage hike.

Why?

Because an increase in wages translates into more economic self-reliance, a bedrock Republican principle. An increase eventually leads to less use of publically funded programs like Food Stamps and Medicaid, the same programs that Republicans perennially seek to cut claiming they diminish an individual's sense of self-reliance.

Regarding self-reliance, Kim says she's "tired of the argument that if minimum wage workers would 'just work hard' they will make more than the minimum wage." The majority of low-wage workers perform jobs that do not provide upward mobility, like daycare workers, cashiers, and food servers.

Even though stalwart Republicans work with great effort to cut programs helping the poor, they do not, for example, bring to bear the same pressure on their Republican counterparts who, for example, pay low wages that push employees to enroll in programs like Food Stamps and Medicare, the same programs they seek to slash.

Dizzy yet?

"It's at best a circular logic that collides with itself. At worst, it's a dirty secret Republicans hope no one will notice," says one veteran observer who asked to remain anonymous.

Although they have never met or even communicated, Kim's counterpart on the West Coast is East Bay Rep. George Miller.

The San Francisco Gate reports that Miller is spearheading a Democratic drive to raise the federal minimum wage, and he is getting support from unlikely quarters, including Silicon Valley millionaire Ron Unz and conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly.

"People are starting to realize how much in federal subsidies are given to these employers that pay less than a living wage," Miller told the Gate.

The federal government supplements low wages through such programs as Food Stamps, school lunches, Medicaid, housing vouchers and the earned income tax credit, a cash grant to the working poor.

Most minimum-wage workers are adults, not teenagers, and the vast majority are women, like those surrounding Kim at her announcement. A study last fall by the UC Berkeley Labor Center found that half of fast-food workers were enrolled in at least one public assistance program. And therein lies the obvious confusion: What exactly is the end game for those opposed to a minimum wage increase? Is it to continue lower wages by fighting increases *and* to push for cuts in social safety net programs? That only worsens the plight of low wage earners.

Even full-time work often leaves minimum-wage workers in poverty. The study pegged the taxpayer cost of federal aid to low-wage workers at $243 billion a year for the fast-food industry alone. Besides following the money, flesh out the thought process: If one opposes a wage increase *and* program cuts, then the end game is to increase social misery.

Estimate of Number of People in Poverty, *All Ages, 2012*
PENNSYLVANIA - 1,688,364
Poverty rate - 13.7%
DAUPHIN COUNTY - 35,019
Poverty rate - 13.2%
CUMBERLAND COUNTY - 23,351
Poverty rate 10.3%
YORK - 45,462
Poverty rate - 10.6%
LANCASTER - 59,731
Poverty rate -11.6%
Source: U.S. Sen. Robert Casey

President Barack Obama will announce Tuesday that he is acting unilaterally to raise the minimum wage for new federal contract workers, signaling ahead of his annual State of the Union address that he'll work around congressional opposition wherever possible this year.

President Obama in late January sign an executive order lifting the minimum wage only for workers under new federal contracts to $10.10 an hour, up from the current federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour.

A Gallup Poll in November found that 76 percent of those surveyed, including more than half of Republicans, backed an increase in the federal minimum wage, currently $7.25 an hour. The argument that higher wages costs jobs is losing its credibility. "Since 21 states and Washington, DC have raised its minimum wage, there are more studies that prove there is little to no effect on job losses. This data is convincing economists, including Nobel Laureates, that raising the minimum wage is the right thing to do," Kim says.

Is there a policy tradeoff in the wind for Republicans and Democrats?

"Legislation to raise the minimum wage would elevate many low-wage earners above the income threshold that qualifies them for benefits and should result in reduced welfare spending," Schlafly wrote. "That's a trade-off Republicans could support."

Unz, a former Republican candidate for governor, is doing more than considering the idea. He's sponsoring a proposed California ballot initiative that would raise the state minimum wage to $12 an hour by 2016.

The wheels are starting to come off the argument against a minimum wage hike.

Essentially, it has become more difficult to hide the fact that wage payers are privatizing profit while socializing loss.

Companies that do not pay a wage that would eliminate a person from eligibility for Food Stamps or Medicaid, or who does not offer health care benefits, is "socializing" that cost - a term most Republicans would balk at yet seem to wholeheartedly embrace when it increases their own bottom line. "It's a form of corporate socialism," one Harrisburg advocate said.

Even Republican darling Phyllis Schlafly has written in her online column that raising the minimum wage "may actually be worth considering" if it saves money on welfare. Higher wages that lead to less use of public programs - because workers have embraced the Republican concept of self reliance - could lead to lower taxes, a Republican mantra.

Kim's bill would increase the state's minimum wage from the current $7.25 an hour to $9 an hour and then $10.10 an hour one year later.

"The current minimum wage, $7.25 per hour, simply does not provide a livable wage," Kim said. "For example, a single mother with two children who works 40 hours per week, for 52 weeks a year, makes $15,080. This is $4,500 below the poverty line, which is $19,530 for a household of three."

Increasing the minimum wage to $10.10 per hour would boost the earnings of a full-time worker by more than $5,900 to $21,008, which would be enough to move a family of three above the federal poverty threshold.

Kim also refused an annual automatic raise guaranteed state legislators and other public officials.

"With support from President Obama, U.S. Senator Bob Casey, Democrats in the State Senate, and perhaps a new Democratic governor and strong support from a majority of Pennsylvanians, I believe a minimum wage increase is within its reach," Kim concludes.

Relive Your 80s with Flashdance

By Central Voice

Do you remember Day-Glo, crimped hair and neon eye shadow?

Was that you?

If so, then you were probably a fan of the 80s and the hit film "Flashdance." The show is now a musical and you can catch it right here at The Hershey Theatre, April 29 through May 4.

The first national tour of Flashdance - The Musical, is the stage adaptation of the 1983 film. It's still inspiring others. One Twitter entry the night of Grammys said "We weren't the only ones who thought Beyoncé used a little inspiration from Flashdance" in her presentation that night.

The sensational Corey Mach plays Nick Hurley, the love interest of Alex Owens played by Jillian Mueller. With electrifying dance at its core, the show tells the inspiring and unforgettable story of Alex Owens, a Pittsburgh steel mill welder by day and a bar dancer by night with dreams of one day becoming a professional performer. When romance with her steel mill boss threatens to complicate her ambitions, Alex learns the meaning of love and its power to fuel the pursuit of her dream.

"My character, Nick Hurley, is greatly expanded from the movie version," Mach tells *Central Voice*. In fact, 16 brand new songs have been written for the musical with music by Robbie Roth and lyrics by Robert Cary and Robbie Roth. "With an expanded character, the new songs, all 80s style, allow me to express a deeper relationship between Nick and Alex. I am part of her dream instead of just pining around as in the movie version," he says.

The show also features a score that includes the biggest hit songs from the movie, including the Academy Award-winning title song "Flashdance - What a Feeling," "Maniac," "Gloria," "Manhunt," and "I Love Rock & Roll."

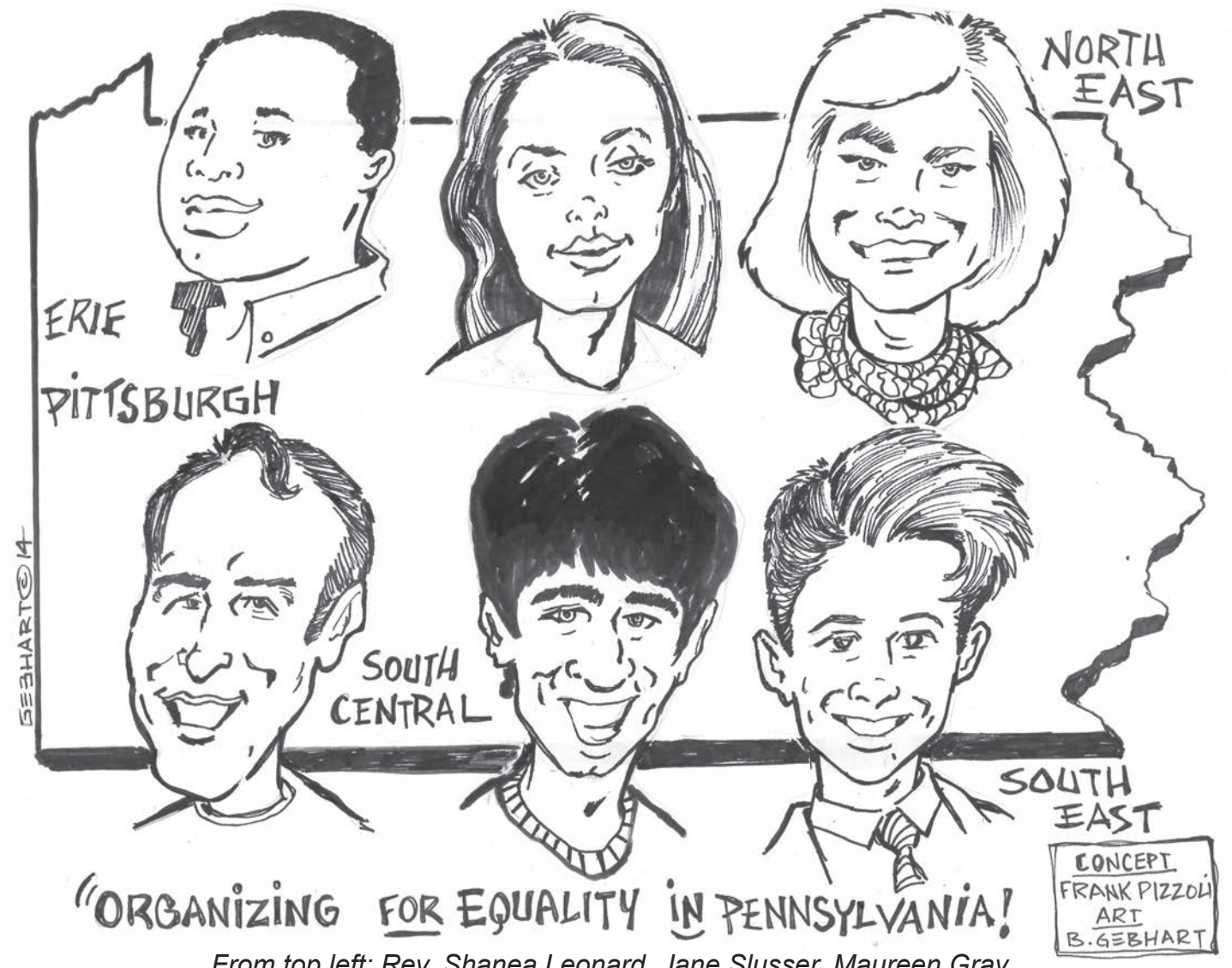
Mach is not new to the region. He appeared in Rent at Hershey Theatre in 2008.

On Broadway he's played in Hands on a Hardbody, Godspell. In national tours he played in Wicked, Rent. In regional productions, Mach has played in Pippin (Pippin), Harold & Maude (Harold), I Love You Because (Austin), Chess (Anatoly). He's also done NYC Readings in Newsies, Circus in Winter (with Sutton Foster).

Mach has his own Youtube presence. "Casting directors today can make that quick check online," Mach says.

Corey Mach plays Nick Hurley in Flashdance

Equality PA Beefs Up for Battle *continued from page one*



From top left: Rev. Shanea Leonard, Jane Slusser, Maureen Gray. From bottom left: Ammon Ripple, Andrew Deiner, Andrew Kunka.

"New staff will mount a statewide effort," says Jane Slusser, who manages the newly-placed organizing team.

Organizers will focus on Harrisburg, Scranton, south East Pennsylvania, including Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh and surrounding areas. One of the organizers will work with faith-based groups across the state.

Jane Slusser

Jane is the Organizing Director and a long-time progressive advocate. Most recently, she led the statewide efforts of the Americans for Workplace Opportunity campaign, securing Senator Toomey's support for ENDA. Jane first came to Pennsylvania to work on the Obama campaign in South Philadelphia in 2008. She returned to Pennsylvania for the 2012 campaign, serving as a Regional Field Director for Northeast PA. She continued working for President Obama through the inauguration, serving as the Associate Director of the National Day of Service. Prior to her life as an organizer, Jane worked at Oxford University Press and also helped start up Catchafire, a social enterprise focused on transforming the nature of community service.

Maureen Gray

Maureen is the Regional Organizer for Northeastern Pennsylvania. Maureen has been an active organizer for most of her adult life. She became involved with President Obama's re-election campaign in 2012, and was eventually brought on board as a Field Organizer for the Scranton area. In 2013, Maureen organized for a Lackawanna County judicial candidate, and served as a Fellow with Organizing for Action. She has lived in Pennsylvania for four years.

Andrew Deiner

Andrew Deiner is the Regional Organizer for Central Pennsylvania. Originally from Bucks County, PA, Andrew started working on campaigns as a volunteer with Equality Maryland during college. Since graduating from the University of Maryland in 2012, he has had the opportunity to work on marriage campaigns across the country and is excited to come to Pennsylvania to help fight to LGBTQ rights in his home state.

Shanea Leonard

Rev. Shanea D. Leonard is the Regional Organizer for Western Pennsylvania. Shanea has lived in PA all her life and pursued education here as well with a B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh and M.Div from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. She is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries. A native of Philadelphia, Shanea resides in Pittsburgh where she pastors JUDAH Fellowship Christian Church, a multi-cultural, affirming family ministry. Rev. Leonard is also the board of several non-profit organizations and she is the organizer/founder of the Pittsburgh Clergy Consortium, an inter-faith network of affirming spiritual leaders in the greater Pittsburgh area. She is a sought after speaker, preacher, and workshop leader.

Andrew Todd F. Kunka, J.D.

Andrew is the Regional Organizer for Southeastern Pennsylvania and resides in Philadelphia. Andrew has served as civil rights organizer and advocate for over ten years. Prior to joining EQPA, he organized with the Americans for Workplace Opportunity to pass ENDA in the U.S. Senate. Andrew has also served as Civil Rights Attorney in NJ focusing on fair housing and was a member of former Mayor Cory Booker's LGBTQ Advisory Concerns Commission, where he coordinated various grassroots initiatives and developed policy proposals to advance progressive policy reform for LGBTQ youth and communities of color throughout the city. Andrew's passion for social justice lead him to complete his Juris Doctorate and Masters in Public Affairs & Politics at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. As an undergraduate at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, Andrew was hired as the first in the Catholic Universities' history to develop resources for the LGBTQ community. Andrew is originally for Phoenix, AZ.

Ammon Ripple

Ammon is our statewide Faith Organizer. After eleven years as a librarian and LGBTQ activist in Pittsburgh, he received a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He has worked with diverse faith communities in local, regional, and national settings, including four years with the National Council of Churches. In addition to doing faith organizing and community relations work for non-profits, he has served a small church as a pastor. Ammon serves on the boards of the United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns and the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Pittsburgh. He and his partner, Sean, are in the ordination process in the United Church of Christ.

Besides the non-discrimination activity in the form of hoping to pass a statewide bill, Equality PA will also involve itself in issues that have crossover and/or overlap with the LGBT community. for example, in a recent email to supporters the organization noted that a new bill championed by Rep. Daryl Metcalfe, "claims that it will help state employees by protecting them from paying union dues. However, under current law no one is forced to pay union dues, and the bill actually has far reaching consequences that will seriously undermine the union protections that state employees currently have on the job." The legislative measures are known as House Bill 1507 and Senate Bill 1034.

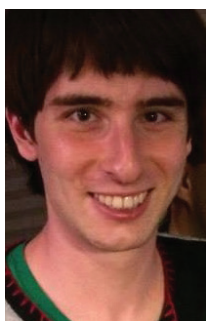
The email also notes that "Unions were the first major employee run organization to add protections for LGBT people in their jobs and have fought hard to keep those protections in their contracts. Without those protections, thousands of LGBT workers in PA could lose their non-discrimination protections at work." Equality PA held a public rally in Harrisburg's Capitol Rotunda to oppose the bills.

Andrew Deiner Needs Your Help!

Phone Bank Volunteers Sought

Andrew Deiner, Equality PA community organizer for the south central region of the Pennsylvania, needs your help. "We'll be calling registered voters during March and April. We'll ask them to contact their state representative and their state senator and ask them to support House Bill 300 and/or Senate Bill 300," Deiner tells Central Voice. The twin bills call for including LBGT protections in all matters that involve public accommodations - employment, housing, credit, and public all accommodations. Deiner is one six staff the organization has brought on as they focus for 2014 on passing the measures.

"We're calling everyone - Democrats, Republicans, and Independent voters," Deiner says enthusiastically. Volunteers will make calls from phone banks set up in churches, allied organizations, community centers. In turn, it is anticipated that those elected officials called will have a deeper understanding of the importance of the bills. "Calls from constituents may be the deciding factor in an representative or senator votring in favor of the measure," Deiner explains.



Andrew Deiner

Individuals interested in volunteering are asked to contact Deiner at - adeiner@equalitypa.org.

KICK START:

College Athlete Conner Mertens Comes Out

By Cyd Zeigler, OutSports

A place kicker at Willamette University in Oregon, Mertens came out as bisexual to his team. He now comes out publicly in hopes of inspiring other LGBT athletes to come out and be true to themselves.

Conner Mertens, the Willamette University football team's up-and-coming kicker, had asked head coach Glen Fowles for some office time to discuss something important. Fowles has been on the team's staff for 18 years. He's moved up the ranks from offensive line coach to offensive coordinator and a year ago was named the team's head coach. Before that he played on the offensive line for the Bearcats for two seasons.

Mertens' disclosure follows a growing pattern. The 6' 2', 255 lb. Missouri All-American Michael Sam last month also said he is gay. The defensive end could become the NFL's first openly homosexual player.

In interviews with ESPN, The New York Times and Outsports, Sam said his teammates and coaches at Missouri have known since August. "I am an openly proud gay man," he said.

In his two decades at Willamette, an hour south of Portland, Ore., coach Fowles has never had to handle anything like this.

Fowles and his special teams coordinator feared Mertens would tell them he was transferring to another school. While Mertens is a red-shirt freshman and missed the 2013 season due to injury, he has the potential to be the team's place kicker for the next four years. It would be a tough loss for the team.

When Mertens arrived for the meeting, Fowles started a subtle soft-sell on the school. Willamette offered great opportunities, the personnel was top-notch, the academics were stellar and Mertens' future with the team was bright. Mertens laughed.

"I'm not going anywhere, coach," Mertens said.

That was a relief.

Mertens asked Fowles if he was a good kicker. Fowles confirmed. He then asked if his role on the team would be affected by things he did off the field, or if he'd be judged by his performance. All that mattered to Fowles was whether he could kick that ball through those two goal posts. That was reassuring, Mertens said, because he had something very personal to share with his coach.

"I'm bisexual," Mertens told Fowles. "I like dudes. I have a boyfriend. And next week, I'm going to tell the world."

Mertens didn't easily arrive at his decision to come out to his coach or team, let alone publicly. No college football player in the United States at any level has ever come out publicly while still playing. Some have come out to their team, many have come out to friends, but none have said publicly that they are LGBT.

"If somebody had come out that I looked up to in the town, I would have been a lot happier.

As a red-shirt freshman, Mertens hasn't played a down for Willamette. With no college experience under his belt and the starting place-kicker position for next season up in the air, it would be easy for a coach to find ways to bury him on the depth chart and quietly push him off the team.

He was taking a big risk. Yet for Mertens, the potential gain for both himself and other youth like him simply outweighed the risk.

"For me growing up, I always felt the biggest thing that caused my depression was the feeling of being alone," Mertens said. "I hate the stereotypes that go along with liking the same sex. You don't have to follow the stereotype to be this way. I made the decision that if I could help anyone else avoid feeling the way I felt, I would."

The people he most wanted to reach are the residents of his hometown of Kennewick, Wash. The Tri-Cities is a conservative area in Southeast Washington that Mertens said isn't the most LGBT-friendly place in the world. Barack Obama garnered just 35% of the vote in the area in 2012; 63% voted against the state's ultimately approved same-sex marriage ballot measure in the same election.

There were some students in his high school who either came out or were known to be gay. Those youth, Mertens said, plummeted to the bottom of the school's social ladder as soon as they bore the label "gay." As it is in many grade schools, hearing gay slurs was a daily occurrence.

"It's not directed at gays, it's just more like if guys are giving each other crap, it's never that you're stupid, it's always that you're a 'fag' or a 'cocksucker.'"

Mertens was never the target of homophobia. He happily dated girls and never let on that he had a secret, yet inside he knew he also had an attraction to other boys. Despite being a successful football player, he feared losing his friends and teammates if he talked about his homosexual tendencies.

"I had a smile on my face all the time as a kid, but I was dying on the inside. In my hometown, you have to fit in or you'll be exiled. If somebody had come out that I looked up to in the town, I would have been a lot happier."

Mertens doesn't want any other youth in his hometown to ever feel the way he did, so he took matters into his own hands. Last night he tweeted a lengthy letter to his hometown in hopes of changing hearts and minds and giving local LGBT youth someone they can point to with pride:

"You are not alone. You do not need to come out but you do need to know that you do not have to go at this by yourself. The aloneness you're feeling is temporary and it will get better. This place is changing...changing for the better. I made the decision that if I could prevent one person from feeling that self-hatred, loneliness, desperation and a thousand other emotions that I felt, I would. I will be damned if I let anyone tell you that you are wrong or weird or not normal.

"Love yourself and allow others to love you. Be who you are and know you're not alone."

Openly bisexual Willamette University place kicker Conner Mertens

Beth Goudy officiates weddings of three same-sex couples.

Marriage Equality: Bridging the Gap

By Central Voice

Two same-sex couples Feb. 7 applied for marriage licenses at Northampton County Court House in Easton and then immediately boarded a bus that drove them across a bridge to Phillipsburg, NJ where they were immediately legally marry.

The event was organized by Pennsylvania Diversity Network for National Freedom to Marry Day. Event sponsors were Metropolitan Community Church of the Lehigh Valley, and Equality PA. The couples were legally married by Rev. Elizabeth Goudy of Metropolitan Community Church of the Lehigh Valley.

Mayor Sal Panto speaking to 150 people rallying for marriage equality in Pennsylvania, while Equality Pennsylvania president Adrian Shanker hold his megaphone.

Meanwhile, a federal judge will hear arguments on whether Virginia's ban on gay marriage should be struck down, which is the position of the state's newly elected Democratic Attorney General Mark Herring. In January, Herring's office notified the federal court in Norfolk that it would not defend the 2006 voter-approved constitutional amendment in a lawsuit — a move with the potential to give gay marriage its first foothold in the South.

The Human Rights Campaign now runs a Communications War Room for Americans for Marriage Equality, a coalition to advance marriage equality nationwide and provide up-to-the-minute information for lawmakers, legal experts, media, and supporters.

Last Nov. 7 150 people rallied and then marched across the same bridge.

Married in New Jersey, all we have to do is walk across a bridge," Adrian Shanker, told the crowd. No stranger to advocacy, he was serving his last day as president of Equality Pennsylvania.

"The bridge is only a few blocks long, but unfortunately, it also represents that we are a few years away from marriage equality in Pennsylvania. I hope our legislators realize how much the lack of marriage equality is hurting Pennsylvania" Shanker said.

Northampton County employees have been asking for the County to provide equal spousal benefits, but the county government has not taken action to grant the benefits. Recently, Lehigh County Executive Matt Croslis enacted equal spousal benefits.

Ralliers march through downtown Easton and across the bridge to Phillipsburg, NJ.

Bradbury called upon St. Luke's University Health Network to stop their "blatantly discriminatory policy of denying gay and lesbian legally married employees equal spousal benefits." Bradbury said, " We recently delivered 1200 signed letters to St. Luke's and yet they are still ignoring the voices of the community the serve."

Contact: Liz Bradbury, Exec. Dir., PA Diversity Network, office: 610-432-5449, cell: 484-241-7568, lbradbury@padiversity.org

Ally in the Academy

By Trum Simmons

Reading Gender

I've been reading. I mean really reading. Having retired from full-time teaching I now have more time to do it, and I'm making the most of it.

Now, I'm talking about books here. I continue to read lots of magazines—our house is full of them, even though we purge from time to time—and I spend time reading online as well.

The trouble with reading is that it makes you think. A lot. I don't finish a chapter and then promptly forget it; it rolls around in my head for a while. And having finished a book many months ago does not mean it's forgotten. I'm still living with two Philip Roth novels in my head, along with one by Barbara Kingsolver and another by Oscar Hijuelos.

My current book is Doris Kearns Goodwin's The Bully Pulpit, a fascinating look at the intertwined lives of Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. Just saying those two names immediately brings two responses: Teddy Roosevelt—the Rough Riders, and William Howard Taft—that huge bathtub he had built for him in the White House.

Too bad those two responses represent almost all that many Americans know about them (and most of their past presidents), but that's a discussion for another day.

One thing striking me as I read about their lives is how gender worked in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Both Roosevelt and Taft were quite progressive in their time, and their views on womanhood and marriage were rather forward-thinking given their culture. At the same time, they had similar biases as their peers in many ways.

The presidents' wives Nellie Herron Taft and Edith Carow Roosevelt were both extraordinary women who were ahead of their time while retaining much of the surrounding culture as well. Neither really matches any stereotype one might have of a First Lady.

A look at early-20th-century views on women and their place in society tells us we have come a long way from, say, 1914, but it's also true that in the enlightenment of 2014 our culture is still wrestling with the question of just what is gender all about.

I grew up in a family in which both my parents played basically traditional male-female roles, having been brought up in the 1920s and 30s. They were less traditional than were their parents, and when I married in 1971 my then wife and I wanted to loosen traditional gender roles even more. It was the 1970s, a decade that built on the counterculture of the 1960s; the second wave of feminism was coming on strong.

And during a 40-year teaching career I've seen quite a change in how people—young people in particular—view gender roles. However, there's also no question that problems remain, for our culture still tends to see things in black and white, in fixed categories of either-or, and much of mass media is no help in this matter.

LGBTQ communities have been a great help in challenging simplistic views of gender and sexuality, thank God, but we've still got a long way to go.

I have some reservations about adding too many more letters to the LGBTQ spectrum, but the impulse is a good one, for it challenges the male-female binary, along with educating people about the fluidity of sexual and gender expression.

The letters T and Q are still a mind-blower for so many straight people, as well as for many lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. Transgender people make many of us wonder how on earth a person can be sure they have body parts that don't match their inner being; and Qs, whether meaning queer or questioning, make us wonder how they can live with such ambiguity.

In either case, society's unease with these letters says more about us than about them. Just because something is outside our personal experience doesn't mean it is somehow invalid. It's hard for us to understand? Well, so what. Work harder to understand, then.

Which brings me back to the problems and rewards of reading: It makes you think a lot. Reading widely can help us understand so many things we otherwise would not deal with. Reading helps us read people as well, which is necessary to appreciate where they're coming from. And increased understanding leads to increasing acceptance and affirmation of all of our fellow human beings.

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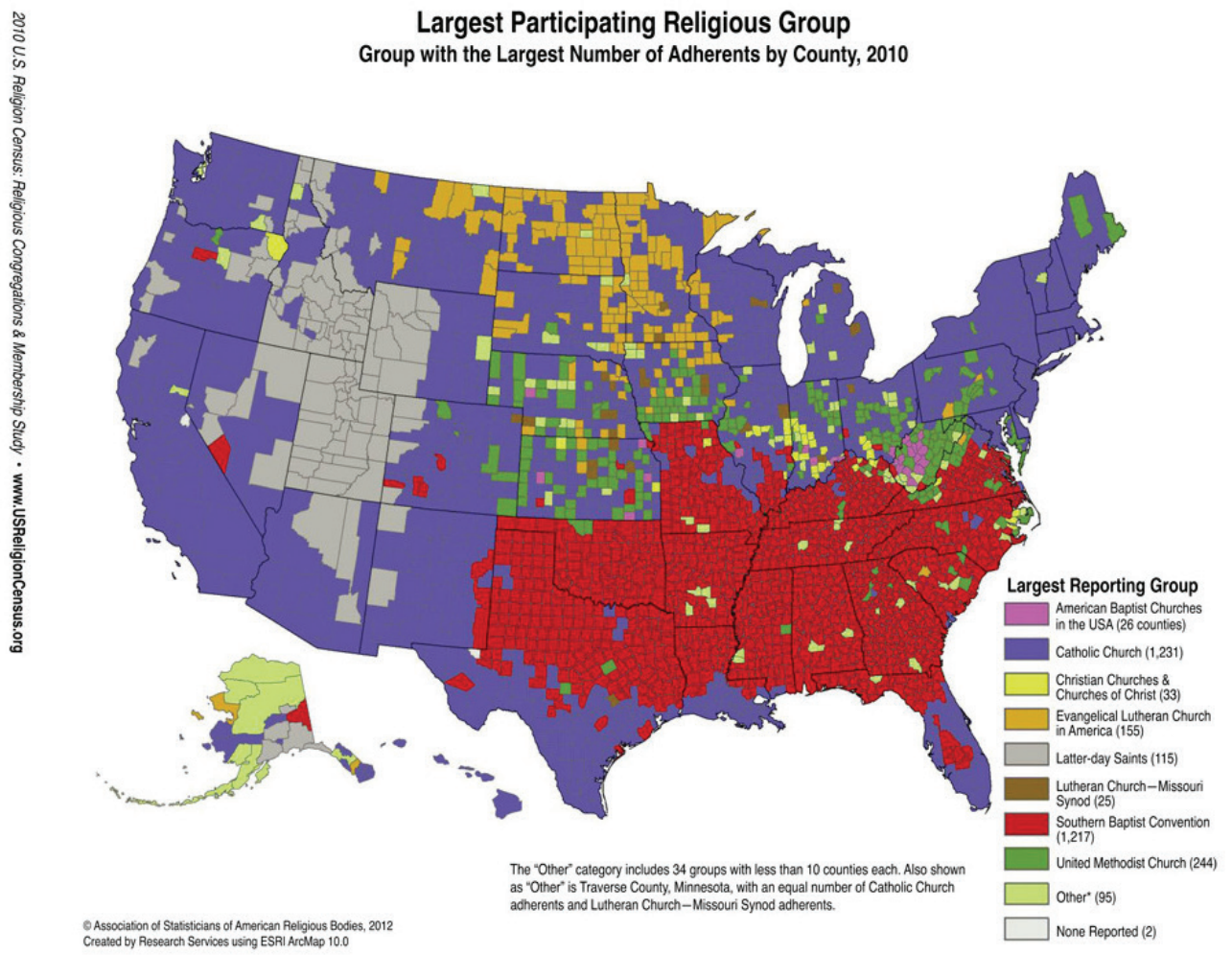
Business Insider Maps Religions


Largest Participating Religious Group
Group with the Largest Number of Adherents by County, 2010
2010 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study • www.USReligionCensus.org
Largest Reporting Group
American Baptist Churches in the USA (26 counties)
Catholic Church (1,231)
Christian Churches & Churches of Christ (33)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (155)
Latter-day Saints (115)
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (25)
Southern Baptist Convention (1,217)
United Methodist Church (244)
Other* (95)
None Reported (2)
The "Other" category includes 34 groups with less than 10 counties each. Also shown as "Other" is Traverse County, Minnesota, with an equal number of Catholic Church adherents and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adherents.
© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2012
Created by Research Services using ESRI ArcMap 10.0

With religion so much in the news as it relates to LGBT issues, *Business Insider* mapped the largest religious groups in each US county based on the 2010 census data.

A FEW OBSERVATIONS:

- *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, aka the Mormon Church, seems to have heeded Mark Twain's advice: "Buy land, they're not making it anymore." In November the Mormon Church bought 2% of Florida.*
- *The Bible Belt, comprised mostly of Southern Baptists, is on full display and informs the strong social conservative strain that runs through American politics.*
- *Catholics barely beat out the Southern Baptists for the highest number of counties with the most adherents. Catholicism's nationwide reach is reminiscent of widespread support of the Notre Dame football team.*
- *Millions of Catholics—whether Irish, Italian, German or Pole —lived vicariously through the wins and losses of Notre Dame's football teams. For that vastly immigrant population Notre Dame football symbolized the triumphs of an ostracized people. It also reflected the ascendancy of U.S. Catholics into the nation's mainstream.*
- *Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, and West Virginia appear to have the most diversity when it comes to dominant religious groups. On the other side is Vermont and New Hampshire, which are considered the Godless states.*

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From the left, Michael Merrigan, Robbie Sweeny, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Michael Petrelis, Central Voice correspondent. Photo credit: Gays Without Borders and Boycott4Russia

Baryshnikov Wears Rainbow Scarf in Solidarity with Gay Russians

Feb. 2 the legendary dancer, actor and cultural icon Mikhail Baryshnikov met with three gay activists and was photographed wearing an LGBT rainbow scarf as a visual expression of solidarity with Russia's LGBT people. Baryshnikov appeared at the Berkeley Rep in "Man in a Case" where he met with activists Michael Merrigan and his life-partner Michael Petrelis, both of whom are active with Gays Without Borders activist group, and Robbie Sweeny who operates the Facebook page Boycott4Russia.

U.N. Secretary General Ban ki-moon called for an end to anti-LGBT discrimination and violence during a speech in Sochi, Russia, that coincided the start of the 2014 Winter Olympics.

In London, 300 people braved atrocious weather and a transport strike to rally in solidarity with Russian LGBTs against the country's anti-gay law and escalating homophobic violence. They urged governments and Olympic sponsors to speak out in support of Principle 6 of the Olympic Charter, which prohibits discrimination. All Out announced at the rally that its petition making this demand had secured 131,447 signatures.

"We must all raise our voices against attacks on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex people," said Ban during remarks he gave during an International Olympic Committee meeting. "We must oppose the arrests, imprisonments and discriminatory restrictions they face."

All Out collected 131,447 petition signatures.

LUX Hosts Chamber

The region's premier hot spot, LUX Night Lounge, hosted the Central Pennsylvania Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce Jan. 16.

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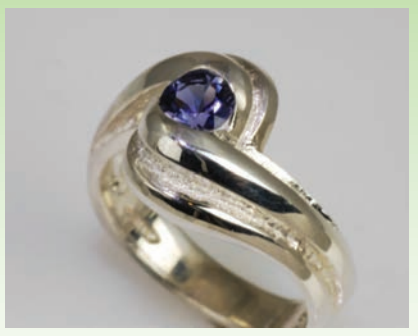

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HEAR ME OUT

New Tunes

By Chris Azzopardi

Jennifer Holliday, *The Song Is You*

Jennifer Holliday is not going. And even though it's been 23 years since the Grammy winner – the original Effie in Broadway's Dreamgirls – released a secular solo studio album, she's telling you ... and you ... and you. On The Song Is You, a lovey-dovey set of standards and R&B notables rooted in her trademark theatrics, Holliday sings with the fierceness and soul of Effie, proving one thing: She's still got it. Hear her tear into "At Last," singing it from all the way down in her gut, and you know that's the sound of a woman who's feeling every last word of what Etta James was preaching. She lets loose on the jazzy title track, a big-band cover that would make even Ol' Blue Eyes himself a proud man, and lets her voice drop down to the floor on the slinky "Touch."

On both tracks, and throughout the album, the use of live strings and horns – and not fabricated instrumentals – creates a warm and inviting atmosphere that feels fresh and classic. When she reaches the soulful power ballad "The One You Used to Be," a song Holliday wrote for Whitney Houston that was never released by the late singer, she's all passion and pain, her voice climbing all the way up to the clouds. When it's over, you'll stand up. You'll applaud. And you should anyway, for the very fact that This Song Is You impressively showcases a diva who's slipped under the world's radar. Let this be Jennifer Holliday's big comeback – because, if you didn't already, you're gonna love her.

Grade: B+

A Great Big World, *Is There Anybody Out There?*

Just thinking about it turns me into a geyser, but "Say Something," the star-making single from Ian Axel and Chad Vaccarino (better known as overnight sensation A Great Big World), really takes a piece out of you. An achingly beautiful ballad about letting go that's understated, honest and heartfelt, it's the kind of song made for curling up in the fetal position and sobbing into a pillow. The original, with just the guys, and the radio single – where Christina Aguilera somehow holds back the belts, harmonizing with powerful nuance and turning out one of her most affecting performances – both fill out the album. The song, with Aguilera particularly, is genius and timeless – everything Big World's debut is not. The Hallmark cliches certainly don't help (the titles alone know no subtlety: "You'll Be Okay," "Cheer Up!" and "I Really Want It"), and Axel's cloying Muppet-man voice isn't enough to elevate them beyond cheesy grade-school platitudes – but the real problem lies in the bad-Broadway, bad-Billy Joel music.

The crescendoing "Already Home," a goopy slowie, is what you expect to hear during the sad goodbye at the end of a WB drama, the Five for Fighting-ish "Rockstar" pretends to be edgy and "Everyone is Gay," while laudable for its social conscience, is so over-the-top cartoonish its message of inclusivity gets lost. And to think this is the same duo that was having a brilliant Adele-like moment with "Say Something" – a song that promised so much more. Am I giving up on them? Not just yet, but I'm sad and disappointed and I need my pillow.

Grade: C

ALSO OUT:

Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings, *Give the People What They Want*

Soul-funk priestess Sharon Jones brings the fire and lights up everything in her path when she blazes through "Retreat!" off her follow-up to 2010's I Learned the Hard Way. "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," she proclaims – and she's not kidding. For nearly 30 minutes, Jones does, indeed, give the people – the fed-up, the heartbroken, the underdogs – what they want: empowerment.

Rosanne Cash, *The River & the Thread*

Like her late father, Johnny, there's an insightful authenticity to the stories Rosanne Cash tells on The River & the Thread, the first great country release of this year. Her low-key prayer "Tell Heaven" shines a light on lost souls, a guitar/drum mix drive "Modern Blue" into a mellowing crawl that's moody and moving, and "When the Master Calls the Roll" is songwriting at its richest.

Chris Azzopardi is the editor of Q Syndicate.

Body Counts:

a Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival

Reviewed by Frank Pizzoli

Sean Strub with Yoko Ono, David Drake and Chuck Brown, who directed The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me at a reception following a benefit performance of the play that raised money for the Treatment Action Group.

Sean Strub has lived at the crossroads of the LGBT Movement and the AIDS Epidemic most of his life. One easily finds his influence in many seminal events of the two overlapping spheres. From the first serious financial solicitation by the Human Rights Campaign - he talked Tennessee Williams into signing the organization's letter to donors - to the founding of POZ magazine - his hand has moved the levers of change.

In his *Body Counts: a Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival* (Scribner, out January 14), Strub tells all, not as juicy tales at the expense of the players but as honest vignettes of human frailty and success, of human comedies and haunting dramas. In an email about his book, he wrote, "honesty is what I hope this book will spark a discussion about..."

In all, this is not your father's history of turbulent years when gay men dropped like flies from AIDS. No revisions but also no regrets. For a glimpse of Strub's perspectives today, see http://vimeo.com/75181260 and Strub's blog, www.seanstrub.com/blog.

Review

Sean Strub's memoir opens on a note of fear and trembling.

And that's the last time fear takes a front seat in *Body Counts: a Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival*. His 401-page hardcover book depicts incredible acts of courage by Strub and his constellation of collaborators.

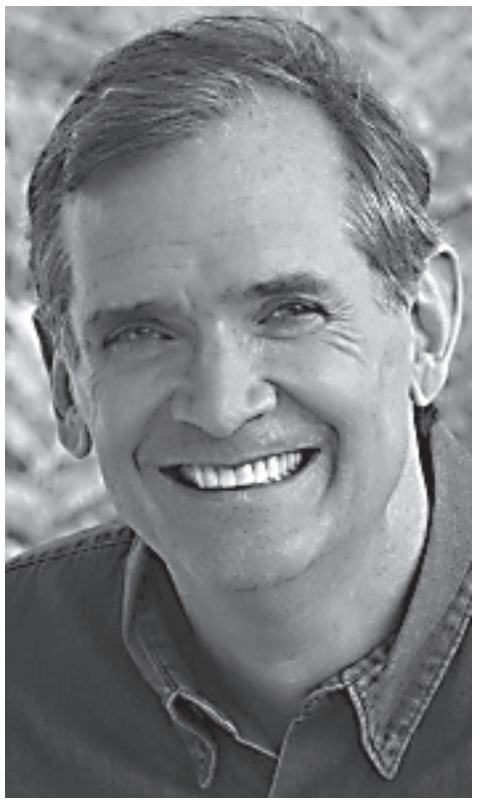
Against thick walls of institutional homophobia and shrieking AIDS hysteria, they forged battles that shaped seminal moments in AIDS history - a condom over then-Sen. Jesse Helms two-story brick Colonial house in suburban Washington and countless other iconic memories of unbridled activism that inspired others around the world.

With NYC AIDS and gay activism a driving force nationwide, along with San Francisco AIDS and gay activism, Strub's close up portrayals of events and people are an insider's telescope for those alive then and younger readers who want an insider's view.

There is no doubt the book will rightfully take its place. A Librarian quote on Edelweiss (multi-publisher online catalog for librarians), says readers will "love, be enraged by, and in the end, be educated by" his memoir. The reviewer calls Body Count "Honest and raw" underscoring that he "has written today's version of Randy Shilts *And the Band Played On*." One of Paul Monette's closest friends, actor-activist Judith Light compared *Body Counts* to Monette's *Borrowed Time*.

Body Count fills in nicely between Shilts's historical account and Monette's intensely personal elegiac memoir. Strub's book is definitely memoir, but reads like a gripping right-with-them history, especially around the New York City AIDS epidemic, which hasn't yet been well documented. Gloria Steinem said," Strub gives us ideas, strength and heart in our own journey."

Still at it, he is indefatigable, Strub remains on the cutting edge of activism. His recently founded Sero Project's mission is to bring HIV laws, nationally and in states, up to current science. *seroproject.com*



Sean Strub, author of *Body Counts: a Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival*

Sean Strub and Yoko Ono

Chamber on the move

By Bill Krenz

Central Pennsylvania Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce

Former "Letterman" Mark Preston to Perform at Mixer; Chamber Announces New Executive Board

Hear former Letterman Mark Preston April 16 at the grand launch of Mx2 Designs. Mx2 Designs president and owner David Cole Snook will host the event at St@rtUp, 1519 North 3rd Street, Harrisburg.

May 14, Heidi Duckworth, Wells Fargo Advisors, is hosting a Lancaster mixer at the Hamilton Club.

The chamber board of directors recently announced a new executive team. Deb McClain, with Members 1st Insurance Services, remains President and CEO. Russ Boggs continues as treasurer. Harry Young, with Hershey Entertainment and Resorts, is now vice president replacing Bill Krenz, Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, who transitioned to Secretary. Hava Pell, Mass Mutual, and Steve Donaldson, Keystone Strategies, remain on the board.

Annual Dinner

The chamber held its annual dinner March 8 at the Sheraton Harrisburg Hershey and featured Keynote Speaker Chris Crespo, Inclusiveness Director at EY (Ernst and Young) for the Americas Region. Crespo inspired attendees with success stories from her experiences as a board member and chair of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and her role with EY.

Chamber members and nationally certified LGBTBE suppliers, business owners and nonprofits had an opportunity to promote their organizations to attendees from Central Pennsylvania and beyond at a business expo and networking reception held in advance of the dinner.

Executive Director

The chamber is excited to announce that our growth has afforded us the opportunity to hire an executive director. The new position will position the organization to expand the work of the business equality movement in the region.

In January, we invited Mark Guenther, executive director, Capital Area Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce in Washington, DC – the 2012 NGLCC

Chamber of the Year - to facilitate a conversation at our board retreat about the best practices he has experienced working in his role as executive director.

A special committee including Chris Gatesman, Holtgate Podiatry and Betsy Devitz, Members 1st FCU, Harry Young, chamber vice president, Deb McClain, president & CEO has been formed to assist in the hiring process.

Past Events

A mixer was held Jan. 16 at LUX Night Lounge, York, hosted by owner Stephen Perko.

A mixer was held Feb. 20 at St@rtUp, Harrisburg, hosted by Adam Brackbill and Adam Porter.

Info: www.cpglcc.org

Inquiring Minds Want to Know: PA LGBT Caucus

Below is a list as of Dec. 18, 2013 of the LGBT Equality Caucus Members in the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

House of Representatives (47):

Reps. Dan Frankel (co-chair), Brendan Boyle, Kevin Boyle, Matt Bradford, Tim Briggs, Vanessa Brown, Michelle Brownlee, James Clay, Mark Cohen, Dom Costa, Paul Costa, Angel Cruz, Mary Jo Daley, Tina Davis, Madeleine Dean, Pam DeLissio, Frank Dermody, Dwight Evans, Flo Fabrizio, Mike Fleck, Ed Gainey, Pat Harkins, Jordan Harris, Bill Keller, Patty Kim, Stephen Kinsey, Thaddeus Kirkland, Steve McCarter, Mike McGeehan, Dan McNeill, Erin Molchany, Dan Miller, Phyllis Mundy, Tom Murt, Mike O'Brien, Mark Painter, Cherelle Parker, Jim Roebuck, Chris Ross, Mark Rozzi, Steve Santarsiero, Mike Schlossberg, Kevin Schreiber, Brian Sims, Mike Sturla, Jake Wheatley and Rosita Youngblood

Senate (13):

Sens. Daylin Leach (co-chair), John Blake, Larry Farnese, Jim Ferlo, Vincent Hughes, Judy Schwank, Matt Smith, Mike Stack, Tina Tartaglione, Rob Teplitz, LeAnna Washington, Sean Wiley and Tony Williams.

80% of UM Church Quits over Firing

By Central Voice

Like any organization, secular or religious, churches cannot exist without rules.

They also cannot exist without members.

Last issue (Jan.-Fe. 2014), we reported that "outing" was not just for gay people anymore, after Lebanon's Rev. Frank Schaefer used that word to describe what happened to him.

Schaefer was defrocked by the United Methodist Church for violating church rules when he performed a marriage ceremony for his eldest son, Tim, and his male partner in 2007. He is appealing the church's decision because he disagrees with his church's policy on LGBT individuals.

Now we can add the word "quitting" to the gay-versus-church vocabulary.

According to The Herald Bulletin, an Indiana church has seen about 80% of its members leave after a gay choral director was forced out over his sexual orientation.

Adam Fraley told the newspaper that he worked for the United Methodist Church in Alexandria for six years and attended with his partner. When a new minister took over the church last year, Fraley said that he resigned because of pressure about his sexual orientation.

With a twist only fate could provide Schaefer's local situation began after the resignation of his congregation's choir director. The choir director is also the mother of Jon Borger, the individual who made the formal complaint that led to his being defrocked because he married his son.

At the time of her resignation, Boger's mother said she felt forced to leave, although not over anything to do with Schaefer and his son's marriage or LGBT issues. About six weeks after his mother left her choir director's post, her son registered his complaint against Schaefer - five years after Schaefer performed the ceremony.

The back story:

Schaefer told Central Voice that "In the fall of 2006 I put in writing to the Bishop and the church that I would be performing the marriage of my son to his partner. I received no response from church leadership." The wedding actually took place in 2007. However, the formal complaint to the church hierarchy from then-fellow parishioner and now former church member Boger did not come until late in 2013.

Boger testified at Schaefer's hearing, a procedure that in many ways mimics a formal court proceeding but is, in fact, a church proceeding that has no standing in the church-and-state separated legal system rooted in the nation's history.

Boger, according to media reports, broke down on the witness stand when questioned by church counsel, describing Schaefer's marrying his son and those who support his action as taking "the law into their own hands" and undermining the church's credibility and integrity.

Although Boger meant church law, Pennsylvania law does not allow same-sex couples to marry, a law that is currently being challenged from a multitude of legal directions. In that regard both the United Methodist Church and Pennsylvania state law mimic each other.

Boger testified during the church trial that six weeks before filing his complaint that his mother, who was employed as the church's choir director, felt as if she were forced to submit her resignation to the church. "He said the two events were unrelated," Schaefer said.

And there you have it.

You can be "outed" for being gay.

You can "quit" if you disagree with your church's policy regarding LGBT congregants.

You can be "defrocked" if your conscience tells you not to follow your church's policy.

Oh Those Catholics and "the Gay"

by Central Voice

San Francisco Archbishop Cordileone recently gave an interview to an openly gay KQED journalist, in which he says his interactions (presumably at the parish in the Castro) with gay Catholics "tenderize" him. Right wing catholic blogs are apoplectic that he used the term "gay Catholics", and the "tenderize" comment is sending them into a veritable seizure.

Pope Francis I

While Bishop of Oakland, Cordileone called on the carpet a national catholic organization based there for using the word "gay and lesbian" to describe its ministry, in favor of the sanitized-with-holy-water term "Individuals suffering from same sex attractions".

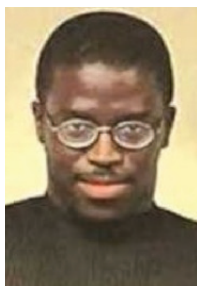
The National Catholic Register reports that Auxiliary Bishop Charles J. Scicluna of Malta said in an interview in Avvenire, the Italian bishops' newspaper, that he had expressed to Pope Francis I his concern about proposed legislation in his country to permit same-sex couples the right to adopt children.

"The Pope showed his sadness at this development, especially on the question of adoption," said Scicluna. I told him that the promoters [of the bill] quote his words: "If a person is gay and seek the Lord and have good will, who am I to judge?" but they don't quote his words from 2010 when he was still Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires. The Pope repeated the phrase of his letter of 2010: "It's an anthropological regression."

So much change within the Vatican.

Open Letter To Christians Claiming Persecution

By Alvin McEwen



I don't expect you to be swayed by my open letter. I don't expect to change your mind with my words. But certain things have to be said.

Now I understand how some of you don't agree with marriage equality (some of you call it gay marriage, I call it marriage equality) and I respect your opinion. I have tolerance for your opinion. I even have tolerance for your opinion that homosexuality is a sin.

However, please note - and don't take this the wrong way - that every time you gripe about being persecuted for simply for being ordered to treat gay couples like you would heterosexual couples by the rule of law, you make damn fools of yourself.

I'm serious. I don't say this to be mean or nasty. I mean no malice intended.

But don't you think that automatically seizing the "persecution card" simply because you have to treat gays the same as heterosexuals in accordance to the law is just a bit too much? Don't you think that you are taking dramatic license a little too far? Or at least overacting just a little?

Let's talk about this. When I think about "religious persecution," I think about the Spanish Inquisition, the Salem Witchcraft Trials, how Mary I of England had over 280 people burned at the stake for supposed heresy, the mass slaughter of the Huguenots.

When I think of persecution in general, I think of mutilated corpses littering the streets, screaming victims being dragged away by brutal soldiers to suffer harsher fates. I think about vandalized places of business, burning homes, mobs throwing rocks at innocent folks, the smell of death, violence, and anarchy in the air.

I fail to see how having your day in court and losing your case fairly as a result of due process and then being interviewed on the most watched news programs in the country by a leggy - if slightly scatterbrained - blonde in a tight dress fits amongst the images of violence, death, and the general mayhem which comes with religious persecution.

I fail to see how being the cause celebre of various multi-million dollared morality groups (and getting a decent income with a speaking gig if you can get a good "Christian" agent) ranks up there with being slaughtered.

Come on guys. In the early days of your faith, the Romans fed you to lions. They crucified several of you. They dipped you in tar and set you on fire. They even distorted the words of the Holy Communion to claim that you practiced cannibalism (which kinda reminds me to later mention how some of you distort science to demonize gays, but that's for another time.)

Do you think God will punish you for simply making a cake for a gay wedding or even marrying a gay couple if you are elected to do such a job?

After all, it is gay tax dollars who is paying the police force to keep your business safe or the fire department to save your business if it should catch on fire.

And it is gay dollars which is paying your salary as an elected official who oversees weddings.

So it seems to me that you are already deep with us as it is. Do you hear any voices above asking you to cease? Have you been struck by lightning yet?

Well then that should tell you something.

LGBTs aren't out to persecute you. We aren't asking that you like us or that you "endorse" us. All we ask is fairness in accordance to the law. After all, this is our country too. And when we appear in public with partners or families or when we talk about issues that affect us, we certainly aren't shoving anything in your faces. We are merely acting like normal human beings going through the regular process of existing on this Earth. You know that process, don't you? It's called having a life.

I hope I haven't bored you or gotten you so upset that you don't consider what I'm saying.

Because next time, I want to talk to you about this "War on Christmas" thing.

Anti-Gay Archbishop Steps Aside after Abuse Allegation

By John M. Becker

Archbishop John Nienstedt, the notorious opponent of LGBT rights who heads the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, announced today that he is voluntarily stepping aside in light of an allegation of inappropriate touching. He repeatedly and emphatically denies the allegations.

CBS Minnesota reports: According to the Archdiocese, Nienstedt is accused of inappropriately touching a young boy on the buttocks during a group photo session after a confirmation ceremony in 2009.

Nienstedt has denied the allegation but will voluntarily step aside from public ministry, effective immediately, while an investigation into the incident takes place.

Once the Archdiocese learned of the allegation, they contacted police. They said in a statement on their website that they are ready to fully cooperate with the St. Paul Police's investigation.

Authorities said the investigation against Nienstedt began around 2 p.m. on Monday -- a day after he publicly apologized and addressed the media regarding sexual abuse allegations involving dozens of priests within the Diocese.

For the past several years, Nienstedt has inserted himself into the battle over civil marriage in Minnesota. He lobbied hard to add a marriage discrimination amendment to the state constitution (an effort that ultimately failed), and fought tooth and nail against the new marriage equality law.

Independent of today's allegations, Nienstedt has been under heavy fire recently over claims that he and other archdiocesan officials covered up sexual abuse and possession of child pornography by priests. The scandal has shaken the faith of many in the archdiocese and eroded confidence in Nienstedt's leadership. Some parishioners and even priests have called on him to resign.

The Archbishop seems to have anticipated charges of hypocrisy. In a letter about the allegations released to Minnesota Catholics today, he writes, "I have taken strong stands on the moral teachings of the Church and been criticized for it. I would not have done so if I did not believe those teachings and was personally bound to living up to them in practice."

Nienstedt closes his letter by indicating that he plans to return to ministry after the investigation is complete.

PREVIOUSLY: In December 2011, he injected a prayer for marriage discrimination into the Catholic Mass itself.

The following month, he told priests in his diocese that if they opposed the Minnesota Catholic Church's campaign to pass a constitutional marriage discrimination amendment, they'd better shut up about it. He also ordered them to organize grassroots political committees in their parishes to work for passage of the amendment -- at parish expense.

Nienstedt's anti-LGBT spiritual bullying was endorsed by Pope Benedict XVI in March of 2012.

He instituted mandatory marriage discrimination lectures in Catholic high schools across the archdiocese.

Just last month, Nienstedt claimed that Satan -- "the Father of Lies" -- causes marriage equality.

Perhaps most infamously, he told the mother of an LGBT child -- who wrote to him pleading for acceptance of her gay son -- that she risked her eternal salvation if she failed to accept the Catholic Church's homophobic teachings.

John M. Becker is the Managing Editor of The Bilerico Project.

MCC column

By Rev. Lori Rivera, Pastor
MCC of the Spirit

Learning Experience

Well Darlene and I survived our first "real" Pennsylvania winter. Folks tell me that this is a more typical winter than we have had for the last couple of years. Temperatures in the single digits or below zero, lots of snow, and a cold wind that makes your ears feel like they are going to freeze off. Some folks have asked me if we didn't wish we were back in Florida. Without a single pause I say "No!"

I can handle two or three months of cold weather better than nine to 10 months of extreme hot weather with the humidity at 99%. And knowing that spring is coming soon with all its color and beauty, which doesn't happen in Florida, is a time to look forward to. Yet handling winter required some new learning. Learning to keep an eye on weather reports, learning to purchase the proper clothing for the cold, and then learning how to layer them (Darlene is better at this then I am). I've learned best through experience; knowing which clothes would keep me warm and how many layers I need for the temperature.

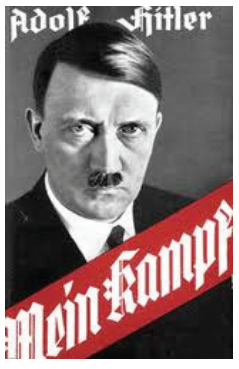
I've experience a similar kind of learning in other times of my life when there was something extreme to "handle." I am so grateful for my first MCC pastor in Florida who stressed God's promise found in 1 Corinthians 10:13. In this verse, Paul tells us that no matter what comes into our lives, God will never give us more than we can handle.

We all have our limits: physical, emotional, and spiritual. There have been times in my life where I just couldn't see the end; the end of grief, the end of stress, the end to a medical illness, the end to financial difficulties, or the end of whatever was going on in my life. This is where I've learned through experience to rely upon God and claim God's promise. That God would see me through. That God would resolve the situation or show me the way out or around the situation.

I'm no different than anyone else. We all feel at times like we have more than we can handle. This is when we all; Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, etc., need to rely upon our higher power and learn from our experiences. My experiences have taught me that sometimes I need to wait for God to act. Sometimes I need to allow the people in my lives to act and not try to control everything. God knows much more than I do and has better timing. Part of the learning experiences has been in watching God work. Observing how God brings people into my life whether for a short term or a long term and the impact they have on my life. It is also true as I watch God move in the lives of others who are in need especially the folks of MCC of the Spirit.

As we move into spring we are reminded of rebirth and newness. This doesn't mean our "stuff" is just going to go away. The "stuff" we need to handle might still be present. Yet, we can be reminded in this season of Easter that Christ has already handled the most difficult situation for us; conquering death and providing eternal life. Come and join us at MCC of the Spirit for this Easter Season as we experience together the movement of God in our lives and learn to be present and of help to and for each other.

God certainly will move in amazing ways.



It Doesn't Get Better Everywhere

It's what commentator Michael Signorile meant when he coined the term American Taliban. What do Texas and Russia have in common? The head of the Russian Orthodox Church's department for relations with society Vsevolod Chaplin maintains that gay relations between men pose a threat to the whole of society. Top Russian cleric seeks nationwide referendum on criminalizing male homosexuality. He says that since Russia is a democratic country, the majority of its people and not some "external forces" must decide what constitutes a criminal offence and what does not. The external forces are critics of Russia's LGBT policies as the Olympics approach. The Criminal Code of the Soviet Union contained an article ordering homosexual contacts between men to be punished with up to five years in prison (eight years with aggravating conditions such as rape). The article was abolished in 1993.

TX Rep. Randy Weber wants to bar federal agencies from recognizing same-sex marriages in states that ban them. He has introduced an anti-gay bill called the "State Marriage Defense Act of 2014″ — which would bar the federal government from recognizing the marriages of same-sex couples who don't live in marriage equality states. Weber represents Texas' 14th District — which covers Galveston, Brazoria and Jefferson counties. According to a statement on Weber's website, the bill is aimed at clarifying the federal government's implementation of law in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision in United States v. Windsor, which struck down Section 3 of the federal Defense of Marriage Act. The bill would require federal agencies to look to a person's state of residence when determining marital status. Since the decision last June, the Obama administration has chosen to recognize same-sex marriages based on where they were celebrated, meaning married same-sex couples are eligible for federal benefits, even if they don't live in marriage-equality states.

Adolf Hitler's manifesto, "Mein Kampf," has become an online hit, flying off the virtual shelves of iTunes and Amazon.com. Two versions of the anti-Semitic screed ranked 12th and 15th in the Politics & Current Events e-book section of iTunes, ABC News reports. It was No. 1 in Amazon's Propaganda & Political Psychology section.

Chris Faraone, a journalist for the news Web site Vocativ, said readers prefer the anonymity e-books provide. "Books that people would probably be a bit more embarrassed to read or display or buy in public, they are more than willing to buy on their Kindle or iPads," he explained.

Meanwhile, Neo-Nazi Maxim Martsinkevich, once jailed in Russia for beating immigrants, is now an immigrant in Cuba. He had been beating up and gay kids and recording it. The muscular, mohawk-sporting Martsinkevich is head of fascist "Okkupay" groups in Russia that track and beat up anyone they consider aberrant. Also known as "Tesak" (Russian for cleaver), first bounced to Ukraine, then Cuba.

arts & entertainment

GREENBELT EVENTS

Kilmaine Saints at The Abbey Bar at Appalachian Brewing Company
March 21, Doors 7 p.m., Show 9 p.m.

With their love of superior music and complimentary beer, the Kilmaine Saints and their Guiness-soaked hearts have been storming the North East, playing hundreds of shows from small-town pubs to large stage events.

OPEN STAGE OF HARRISBURG

Court Street Cabaret
Stuart Landon and his friends return
March 21 & 22 at 8 p.m.

The best of Broadway and beyond is sure to please your ears and leave your toes tapping. Audiences can expect old and new show tune favorites from songwriters like Stephen Schwartz, Rogers & Hammerstein, William Finn, Craig Carnelia, and Jerry Herman.
Tickets: 717-232-OPEN (6736)

MAJESTIC THEATRE

Gettysburg College
Church Basement Ladies present: A Mighty Fortress is our Basement
March 13, 2 & 4:30 p.m.

Your favorite Church Basement Ladies are back and up to even more crazy antics in the all-new musical. This hilarious fourth installment of the Church Basement Ladies series has great new songs and more lessons reluctantly learned!
Tickets: $39, $36, $33 @ 717-337-8200; majestictheater@gettysburg.edu

STAND CAPITAL

Moscow Festival Ballet: Swan Lake
Strand Theatre
March 26, 7:30 p.m.

A story for all ages! Under the artistic direction of Sergei Radchenko, legendary principal dancer of the Bolshoi Ballet, this company of 60 dancers performs Tchaikovsky's masterpiece, Swan Lake. An enchanting fairy tale, Swan Lake is a magical story of true love's triumph over evil. The whole family will enjoy the excitement of this full-length ballet filled with colorful costumes and world-class dancers.
Tickets: $39, $43, $49
Info: http://www.mystrandcapitol.org

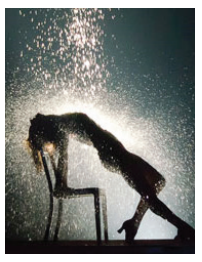
SHARADIN BIGLER THEATRE

Ephrata Performing Arts Center
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
By Dale Wasserman
Based on the novel by Ken Kesey
March 20 - April 5

This dramatization was a major hit Off-Broadway and was the basis for the classic Academy Award-winning movie. Now EPAC will bring this challenging and visceral fable back to vivid life onstage.
Buy Tickets Online; Phone: (717) 733-7966

HERSHEY THEATRE

Flashdance - The Musical
April 29 - May 4
Time: Tuesday - Thursday: 7:30 p.m.
Friday: 8 p.m.
Saturday: 2 p.m. & 8 p.m.
Sunday: 2 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.
**ASL Interpreted performance will be on Sunday, 2 p.m.*



Celebrating its 30th Anniversary, Flashdance - The Musical features a score that includes the biggest hit songs from the movie, including the Academy Award-winning title song "Flashdance - What a Feeling,""Maniac,""Gloria,""Manhunt," and "I Love Rock & Roll." In addition to these hits, 16 brand new songs have been written for the musical with music by Robbie Roth and lyrics by Robert Cary and Robbie Roth.
Tickets starting at $28.00; 717-534-3405, 1-800-745-3000, HersheyTheatre.com.

WHITAKER CENTER

Kat Edmonson
April 18, 8 p.m.
Sunoco Performance Theater

Kat Edmonson is an American singer and songwriter from Houston, Texas who moved first to Austin, Texas, then Brooklyn, New York. Her debut album, Take to the Sky, self funded and consisting solely of pop covers and jazz standards, was released in 2009. Her second album, Way Down Low, consisting mostly of original work, came out in 2012, funded by a Kickstarter campaign.
Tickets are $22.50, 29.50 & $39; 717-214-ARTS (2787)

Harrisburg Men's Chorus Hosts NY Chorus and Is Ready for Close Up

Harrisburg Men's Chorus presents "The Garden in the Keystone" March 1, 8 p.m. at the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg, 1280 Clover Lane, Harrisburg. Admission is $15.

Certain to raise the roof with music, the evening brings back New Jersey Gay Men's Chorus after a successful first visit to the region. The visiting chorus will feature a few of their favorite musical selections. The local men's chorus will add a few of their own songs as well as perform in several combined musical numbers.

The March 1 concert is followed by a dessert reception so audience members can meet the visiting chorus.

Close Ups

Lights, camera, action! On May 3-4, the chorus presents "We're Ready for Our Close-Ups!" The shows are planned for May 3, 8 p.m. and May 4, 2 p.m. at Theatre Harrisburg – Krevsky Production Center, 513 Hurlock Street, Harrisburg. Admission is $15

Guest artistic director Adam Gustafson has designed a program sure to entertain and inspire.

The chorus journeys through famous songs from the "silver screen" of the 20th Century. Selections include songs from films made in the region. Film genres include classics, comedies, family, tear jerkers, and romance - and the colorful choralography you have come to expect from the chorus as well as special "guests" providing light-hearted homage to the films.

Info: http://www.harrisburgmenschorus.org

York events

PROJECT FEEDERWATCH - March 18, 8:30 a.m. through June 3, 3:30 p.m.
Project FeederWatch is a citizen science program in which participants count the number and species of birds visiting the feeders from November 13 through early April. The collected data is forwarded to Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and becomes part of a nation-wide data set which tracks winter bird population trends. Beginners are welcome. ADA accessible. One hour every other week commitment. If you are interested, please call Kelsey at 428-1961. Location : Nixon Park

MOONLIGHT BIKE RIDE - April 12, 7:30 p.m. - midnight
Take a 9-mile ride under a bright moon, learning about local history and nature. Tonight's special program: birds of prey. Light refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the ride. $5, children under the age of 12 are free. For more information view the Moonlight Bike Ride Flyer. Location : Rail Trail Park, Railroad Parking Area

EARTH DAY SERVICE PROJECT: GARLIC MUSTAD PULL! - April 27, 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.
Celebrate Earth Day by joining Park Naturalist Kelsey Frey for a short orientation to the life and troubles of the invasive weed, garlic mustard, and its most common partners in crime. Then hit the trails in teams or individually to pull this pest before it takes over. Return to the Nature Center at 3pm to taste some culinary creations made using this tasty pest. This is a great service project for scout groups. FREE! Please register by calling 428-1961. Location : Nixon Park

Lancaster events

"Folklore" - March 7-April 18
Original fraktur drawings, contemporary works of art by Amy Cutler, Clare Grill, Clare Rojas. Free admission.
Contact: (717) 396-7833
Pennsylvania College of Art & Design

SYFAN Book Club - Apr 10, May 8, Jun 12
Not everyone takes science fiction and fantasy literature seriously, but we do! Kendra Boersen leads this new book club that speaks your language, and where you'll get to suggest books to read and discuss with people who appreciate the genre as much as you do. Admission free. Monthly on the Second Thursday of every month. For book titles and more info visit: lpl-syfanbc.eventbrite.com. Contact: (717) 394-2651
Lancaster Public Library

Lancaster County's Best Kept Secrets Tour - April 12-26
An unusual shopping/food and fun adventure featuring 37 off-the-beaten path businesses, hand-picked for their uniqueness. Set up like a home or garden tour, you'll travel place to place, in your own vehicle, enjoying all the special free things (refreshments, games, gifts, demos, workshop tours, make & take projects, etc) the businesses have planned for you. Your ticket is valid the entire time—do what you can in a day or take 17 days—it's up to you. All tour businesses are open Mon thru Sat from 9 to 5. Admission: $8 each ($1 per ticket donated to YWCA) Contact: (717) 721-9409
Location: Throughout Lancaster County

Peter LaBarbera

By D'Anne Witkowski

I do not watch *The Disney Channel*. Mind you, this is not any kind of elitist pronouncement. It's just that I'm more than seven years old.

The Disney Channel does play a small role in my life, however, as my son sometimes watches it. Or, more accurately, it is frequently on the TV in the kids' area at the gym where I drop off my son while I go work out in the hopes that it will help me live that much longer so I can keep doing the important work of being his mom. Which I love doing because I love him.

At times when I pick him up his eyes are glued to one of many weird Disney sit-coms where children and adults try to approximate real-world snarky humor, except because it is a show for children any and all rough edges are not just smoothed, but are melted into a edgeless blob of mindless pap.

Which leads me to the show *Good Luck Charlie*, a show I never would have intentionally sought out except for the fact that the show recently featured Taylor, a little girl with two moms who comes over to have a play date with Charlie, the show's namesake.

So Charlie's mom Amy and dad Bob meet Susan and Cheryl, Taylor's two moms. And Amy and Bob kind of bumble their way good-naturedly through the whole two-mom experience. The big gag is that Susan goes to watch "the game" in the basement with Bob, and Cheryl stays upstairs and chats with Amy. Except the pairs don't really mesh (Bob won't shut up about the bugs he exterminates for a living, and Cheryl won't stop finishing Amy's sentences) and so a headache is faked and the play date is over.

LaBarbera, of Americans For Truth About Homosexuality, warns, "This is probably The Disney Channel's first 'baby step' into more aggressive homosexual advocacy — which is not unexpected given America's moral decline, but tragic just the same."

It's all really dull, honestly. Though I have to say good for Disney for daring to show that lesbian couples can be totally boring and annoying just like the straight couples they usually parade in front of us.

Do I need to mention that people are upset? Because people are upset. The largely pretend *One Million Moms* are threatening to boycott or some such bullshit.

But it's Peter LaBarbera's anger that most amuses me. LaBarbera, of *Americans For Truth About Homosexuality*, warns, "This is probably *The Disney Channel's* first 'baby step' into more aggressive homosexual advocacy — which is not unexpected given America's moral decline, but tragic just the same."

Yes, how tragic that my kid might see another kid with two moms on TV. Or, worse, that kids who don't have two moms will be subjected to something so commonplace.

"If you are a Christian and/or moral-minded parent who wants to teach your children that homosexuality is aberrant and wrong behavior — i.e., you don't want to model sinful relationships as normative to your kids — YOUR morality and faith, and your child's innocence, are being undermined by Disney."

He's right that Disney is undermining your child's innocence, though. Disney doesn't care about anything other than making money. Which is hardly a virtuous enterprise.

But are Cheryl and Susan going to deflower America's kids? Not so much. Granted, this was not an anti-gay episode. Cheryl and Susan aren't run out of Charlie's house. Bob doesn't threaten to "rape them straight" and Amy doesn't smack them in the head with a crucifix or anything. Perhaps such a rewrite would help LaBarbera sleep better at night.

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by Bruce Norris
april 11 - may 3, 2014

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Exploring San Francisco's **Neighborhood**

OUT OF TOWN
by Andrew Collins

Encompassing a vast, architecturally and demographically diverse tract of central San Francisco that extends from the Mission District to the bay, SoMa is most markedly defined by what it stands for: it's the neighborhood south of Market Street. Within this urban swath containing everything from shiny new loft condos to vintage refurbished warehouses, you'll find a vibrant stretch of waterfront on the bay, the culturally dynamic Yerba Buena Gardens complex, several stylish hotels, the heart of the city's leather-and-Levi's queer scene, a few of the longest-running gay dance clubs in the country, and some of the city's trendiest restaurants and cafes.

Day or night, you'll find plenty to see and do in SoMa. Although LGBT tourists often look upon the Castro as San Francisco's must-see neighborhood, the SoMa gay scene - concentrated around Folsom and Harrison streets near the confluence of the 101 and I-80 freeways - has been humming along for even longer, and it offers an impressively eclectic, creative, and edgy vibe that appeals to everyone from queer artists to sophisticated foodies to leather-and-fetish aficionados.

At the upper (northeastern) end of SoMa, closer to the Financial District and waterfront, the neighborhood is more touristy and traditional. This section is anchored by the mammoth Moscone Convention Center, named for former mayor George Moscone who was - with iconic gay rights activist Harvey Milk - assassinated in 1978.

It's about a 2.5-mile walk (allow 45 minutes to an hour) to get from the bay to southwestern SoMa's border with the Mission District, and the section in the middle - from about 4th to 8th streets - can be a little Spartan and less interesting (though still quite safe). At night, consider cabbing it if trying to get from one of the hotels up near Yerba Buena Gardens to the gay-bar and hip dining district.

SoMa Sightseeing Highlights

Right where Market Street ends on the bay, at Embarcadero, you'll find San Francisco's Ferry Terminal Building, which contains a slew of great restaurants and food shops. The gorgeously restored 1898 building overlooks San Francisco Bay - ferry boats to Oakland, Sausalito, Tiburon, and elsewhere still leave from the piers behind the building. There's also a terrific farmers market early on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Across street, stop inside the small but very interesting San Francisco Railway Museum, which contains exhibits on the city's famed cable cars and F-line streetcars.

The contemporary Yerba Buena Gardens comprises terraced gardens and waterfalls, sculptures, an arts center with performance halls and art galleries, cafes, a children's museum, and an ice-skating and bowling center. Taking up two large city blocks, this complex also contains the huge and modern Metreon shopping mall and movie plex, and several intriguing museums: the Museum of the African Diaspora, the Cartoon Art Museum, the Contemporary Jewish Museum, and the California Historical Society. Across from Yerba Buena, the outstanding San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) is closed during a major expansion until early 2016, but the excellent SFMOMA museum store is still open, and in the meantime, the museum is presenting a number of rotating exhibits at other venues around the city.

The neighborhood has quite a few commercial art galleries and while down near the Mission, the SoMa Arts Cultural Center presents provocative exhibits throughout the year - they're often specifically of queer interest. Several other galleries are located along Howard and Folsom streets in this part of the neighborhood.

Restaurants

SoMa's upper reaches abound with noteworthy restaurants, many of them located in the upscale hotels mentioned below. In the Ferry Terminal Building, don't miss Gott's Roadside for delicious burgers, seafood, and garlic fries; and the Slanted Door for upscale Vietnamese cuisine.

Many of the top tables in SoMa are down in the lower end, however, amid the neighborhood's gay bars. A culinary high point is Radius San Francisco (radiussf.com), a stylish high-ceilinged storefront space specializing in gorgeously plated, locally sourced California cuisine and fine regional wines - on warmer days, dine on the patio. With vintage photos and framed Life Magazine covers on the wall, old-school Rocco's (roccoscafe.com) is a lively, gay-popular spot for well-prepared classic red-sauce Italian fare, from linguine with sautéed calamari to chicken marsala with pasto pesto. Along buzzy 11th Street, check out Bergerac (bergeracsf.com) - a glamorous space with craft cocktails and creative small-plates snacks (Asian duck tacos, shrimp fritters) - and Bar Agricole (baragricole.com), known for stellar mod-American cooking.

A fun place to dine out with friends, Fondue Cowboy (fonduecowboy.com) offers a novel take on the old-school dining classic. These aren't your typical fondues - try the Quick Draw (Manchego cheese, white wine, roasted red pepper, roasted garlic) or High Noon (white chocolate with balsamic-strawberry puree). Fans of Asian cuisine should check out Basil Canteen (basilthai.com), a contemporary Thai restaurant in a handsome warehouse space with exposed-brick walls - creative dishes like grilled coconut-marinated pork skewers and stir-fried skirt steak with a chili-brandy sauce are among the offerings. Also notable is Izakaya House (izakayahouse.com), a convivial late-night option for first-rate sushi and Japanese fare.

Gay Bars and Nightclubs

SoMa's lower section is home to some of the city's most historic gay bars, including the End Up, which has been going strong since 1973 - it was featured famously in Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City series. The crowd these days is a catch-all: queer and straight clubbers of all ages, from college students to some who may very well have been here on opening night four decades ago. Also legendary is The Stud (studsf.com), which is nearing its 50th birthday and is justly famous for its Meow Mix gender-bender Tueday variety shows and is fun for dancing on weekends, too.

The neighborhood has long been one of the world's leading hubs of gay leather culture - it plays host to the infamous Folsom Street Fair (folsomstreetfair.org) each September as well as the Up Your Alley fetish fair in late July. The renowned San Francisco Eagle (sf-eagle.com), which shuttered for a time and was nearly redeveloped as an upscale restaurant (causing a huge community kerfuffle), reopened early in 2013 and is as invitingly dark and saucy as ever, if less strictly leather-oriented than it used to be. These days you'll find a diverse crowd, including otters and bears, hipsters, leather daddies, and even some twinks. Other good bets along Folsom Street include the ultra-cruise-y Powerhouse (powerhouse-sf.com), with such creative theme nights at Nipple Play and Kink Salon, and the venerable Hole in the Wall Saloon (holeinthewallsaloon.com), which has long billed itself "a nice little queer bar for filthy bikers and loudmouth punks." Nearby, the Lone Star Saloon (lonestarsf.com) is a beloved neighborhood bar with a good-size patio, great happy hour drink specials, and a furry all-ages crowd.

11th Street between Folsom and Harrison has gradually become SoMa's hippest bar-hopping block, with a slew of notable restaurants, lounges, and clubs, including the gay nightspot BeatBox (beatboxsf.com), an eclectic space for dancing that offers everything from country music on Tuesdays to Tea-Rex T-dances on Sundays; and DNA Lounge (dnalounge.com), a huge dance club and live-music venue with a mixed crowd and an adjacent pizza restaurant that's handily open 24/7.

continued on page 30

Five-artist Invitational Exhibit through March

David Volkman is sponsoring a five-artist invitational exhibition through March 27 at the Art Association of Harrisburg galleries, 21 North Front Street.

The exhibit features sculptures by Todd Fry, oils by Susan Benigni-Landis and Jill Peckelun, monotypes by Sharon McCuen, and photographs by Blair Seitz.

Susan Benigni-Landis

Susan Benigni-Landis, Lewisberry has always been inspired by colour, shape and movement in nature, making landscape painting a great fit for her. Through plein air painting, she strives to capture not just a single moment, but also the atmosphere and "feel" of the day, taking on the challenge of changing light, studying the layers of colour in the environment. Often she makes scenic sketches on location and then creates larger oil landscapes in her studio. Benigni-Landis holds her dual BA in art and psychology from Thiel Collage and her Masters in Education from Indiana University. She exhibits her work widely in the region.

Todd Fry

Todd Fry, York first expressed his artistic talents as a musician, attending Berklee College of Music in Boston before moving to New York to purse a career in the recording industry. Additionally, he discovered he had a gift of storytelling through film and video, producing award-winning documentaries for local NBC and PBS affiliates.Fifteen years in television earned Fry numerous awards, including 7 Emmys. During this productive period, he taught himself to paint and sculpt, bringing him to the next chapter in his artistic life. As a sculptor, Fry combines wood, stone, and steel to explore the "complex dualism of human nature in an ongoing quest to define what it means to be alive." Fry has exhibited his sculptures in Harrisburg, Philadelphia and Washington, DC.

Sharon McCuen

Sharon McCuen, Selinsgrove, is a retired public school teacher who continues to enrich her life through creating art with watercolour and acrylic painting, and printmaking. McCuen, who holds her BA from Bloomsburg University, and her MFA from Penn State, found her first inspiration for her art while in graduate school, where a philosopher spoke on "the stuff of water" from Greek mythology. The philosopher suggested that artists have the ability to reach into the "pool of memories where all one's thoughts and deeds are deposited on their journey through life." McCuen's hope is that people will glimpse valuable truths of life in the beauty of her artwork.

Jill Peckelun

Jill Peckelun, Hershey, moved to this area a few years ago, and her paintings in the exhibition are representative of her seeing the Susquehanna and Lebanon Valleys with "fresh eyes and fresh paint." Peckelun says that her artistic style is "influenced by the freedom of the Impressionists, and so accordingly, the Asians, the Arts and Crafts movement of the 1890's, the design style of Art Nouveau, and the immediacy of plein air work." Peckelun studied for several years with John Booth of Easton, who gave her an excellent foundation in the technical skills of mixing colours from a limited palette, and applying paint cleanly. An "alla prima plein air" oil painter, Peckelun works in the courageous tradition of painters like John Singer Sargent, Thomas Moran, and NC Wyeth, with the fearlessness of "painting constantly."

Painting by Jill Peckelun

Blair Seitz

Blair Seitz is the photographer of 22 books. A versatile photographer, Seitz notes, "I am entering my fourth life." He was first a successful photojournalist in Africa and Asia, and then devoted his time for 10 years to corporate and editorial photography. In the 1990's he became an avid stock and book photographer, and in 2000, he opened a gallery, plunging into art photography. He is now a member of ArtPlus Gallery in West Reading. Seitz has exhibited throughout the region, as well as in New Jersey, and he was awarded a fellowship grant from the PA Council on the Arts. Additionally, Blair Seitz received a Silver Medal in New York's International Film and TV Festival for text and photographs about four Kenyan ethnic groups.

Gallery hours are 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Mon.-Thurs.; 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat., 2-5 p.m. Sun. Info: 717-236-1432; www.artassocofhbg.com

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❤ your pets

By Dr. Jose Venereo

Tick and flea prevention

Wintertime is here and certainly comes along with its frigid temperatures. That means pet owners don't have to worry about using flea and tick prevention *(True or false?)*. False. Your warm, cozy home is the perfect environment for fleas. They want to escape the cold, too!

Your cat and dog are the perfect hosts for fleas. Fleas can transmit tapeworms to cats and dogs and can cause anemia in severe infestations. To prevent fleas on your pets, use topical flea and tick prevention year-round. In addition to fleas, ticks can thrive in the short warm spells we encounter in the winter and can spread tick-borne diseases to your pets.

If your cat, dog (and environment!) become infested with fleas, talk to your veterinarian. He or she will give you the best recommendation for your individual situation. In general, your veterinarian will recommend monthly topical flea and tick prevention and discuss brands that work better than others (all are not created equally!). Your veterinarian will also advise you on how to eliminate fleas from your household. This can include frequent vacuuming, washing linens in hot water, using home flea sprays and/or eliciting the help of an exterminator.

The key to avoiding flea and tick infestations is to be proactive.

HINT: Many over-the-counter flea products are not effective against fleas and/or ticks due to resistance.

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Planning a Sensitive Funeral

By Central Voice

Death of a loved one is difficult enough without adding extra emotions because family, friends or co-workers do not embrace your same-sex relationship.

Jason A. Switek and Cory A. Messinger, of Hetrick-Bitner, Geigle and Smith Funeral Homes, Harrisburg understand.

Switek is a Funeral Director and Continuing Care Supervisor. Messinger coordinates Aftercare and Advance Planning. They can both work with individuals to pre-plan funeral arrangements and after the service on following up on details.

Both Switek and Messinger are members of the Central Pennsylvania Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.

"Some deaths are expected. Some are not," Switek says. He stresses the obvious when he explains, "planning is better than not planning" but understands arrangements are often delayed until another day.

Switek normalizes funeral planning. "I ask if something happened when you were returning from this meeting, who would be in charge of your funeral and do they know what your wishes are?" And that's the whole point of pre-planning a funeral or memorial service - the peace of mind it provides.

Jason A. Switek

Cory A. Messinger

He notes that pre-planning a funeral can avoid "emotional spending" at the time of a loved one's death. "We're all human and at the time of death it's easy to make costly decisions that are not really necessary but we feel compelled to make. Our emotions are driving our thinking," he explains. Planning ahead allows one to make decisions at a time when one is not in the throes of grief.

Switek and Messinger have also developed a way to designate without confusion one's intentions. They have developed a form under the guidance of legal counsel.

"It's like Power of Attorney, except it extends beyond death as it applies to funeral arrangements," Switek says. POA expires upon the issuer's death. For the purpose of a memorial or funeral, individuals in advance of their own death can stipulate with the form that, for example, a partner or friend can be designated to plan the services in place of the next of kin. They can also indicate the type and location of a service.

"Essentially, because same-sex relationships are not recognized in Pennsylvania, or same-sex marriages performed in other states, siblings or parents can exercise a legal right to specify funeral arrangements," Switek explains. Without a clear statement of intentions, there is no way to insure a deceased loved one's intentions will be followed.

Switek normalizes funeral planning. And that's the whole point of pre-planning a funeral or memorial service - the peace of mind it provides.

Financial planning also enters the picture.

Switek and Messinger offer affordable contracts that are handled by a third-party administrator in to insure against fraud. "We advise to hedge against inflation when thinking about future funeral services," In other words, a $10,000 life insurance policy today may not cover costs 20 years later. "Our products keep up with inflation

and also protect from the 'Medicaid spend down,' meaning they do not count as an asset," Switek explains. "You pays today's price, that price is locked in and it keep up with inflation."

Aftercare is an important aspect of funeral arrangements.

"Once a funeral is completed, many survivors don't know what comes next, Messinger explains. He contacts a survivor a few days after a service to provide information on Social Security issues, how to approach the Veteran's Administration, or personal business matters. "This aftercare service is yet another reason we are the premier funeral provider in the area. The Aftercare is an extension of our services, at no charge to the families, thus we ensures that we are doing all we can for our grieving families. Messinger says.

"It's worth the effort to have a plan in place. That way you can focus on celebrating a loved one's life, grieving, and being with family, not consumed with decisions at a stressful time," Messinger says.

Foundation for Hope Opens Community Center in Harrisburg

By Central Voice

Where do you find "safe space" if you're dealing with bullying, depression or suicide?

The newly formed Foundation for Hope has an answer.

The foundation recently announced the March 1 opening of "A Place for Hope Community Center" located in Harrisburg, 107 Locust St.

The foundation's mission is "to raise awareness of the harmful realities of bullying, depression and suicide through education, support and intervention," Brad Martin, foundation president, tells *Central Voice.*

Why Harrisburg?

"Harrisburg is a dynamic and wonderful place to live and grow. However, those dealing with bullying, depression, or contemplating suicide often have trouble finding the positives in life. We feel Harrisburg provides the perfect environment to connect those individuals with services and assistance that can help change their lives for the better," Martin says.

"The foundation will host events and public engagements including speakers, movie screenings, educational events, discussions, debates, and conferences," Martin added. He also invites other organizations to use the center as a venue for their events.

Although Martin also serves as president of Pride Festival of Central PA (2011-2014), the foundation services are all individuals, especially younger individuals, regardless of sexual orientation. "We're here for anyone who needs us," Martin explains. In the last year, he estimates the foundation has received between 300 and 400 calls for help and information. "About 3%, 4% of those calls were from LGBT individuals," Martin notes, a statistic that generally reflects what US Census and other data indicates is the number of gay people in the U.S. population.

The organization will rely on "an expert volunteer base developed in the Harrisburg and West Shore areas," founder Jesse Gantt said in a news release. There are about 15 volunteers already trained and more expected after a second round of training. Training is provided by the foundation based on a manual they developed.

"We want to connect individuals affected by bullying, depression, or suicide with resources and support that can help change lives for the better," Martin says.

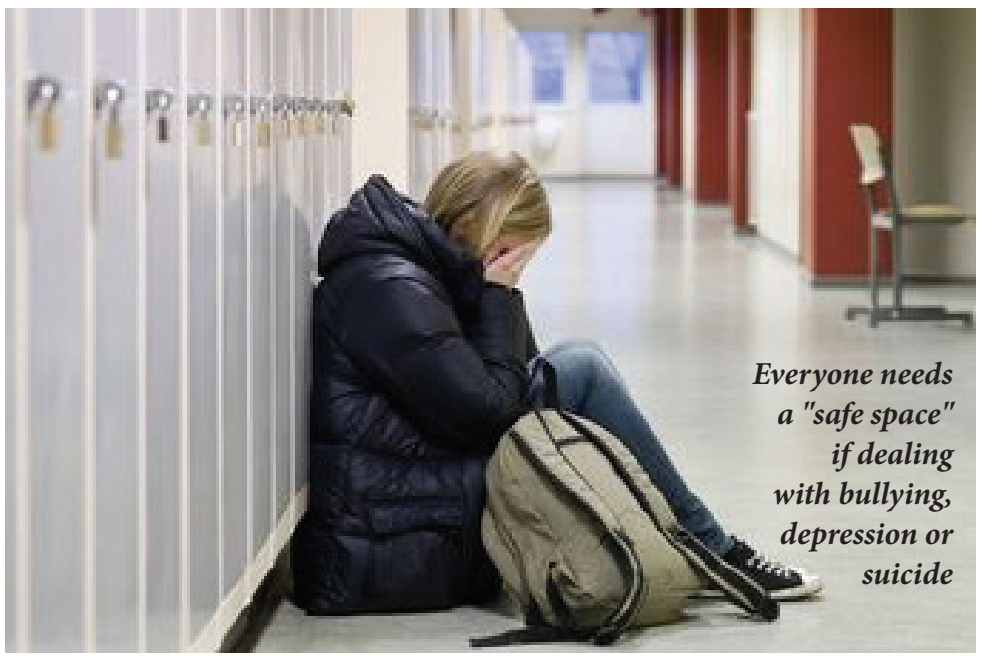
"Harrisburg and surrounding areas host some of the most caring, concerned, and compassionate residents and the most dedicated mental health service providers Pennsylvania has to offer," Gantt said, adding that Harrisburg is "the perfect choice as the location of our community outreach center."

The Foundation for Hope Inc is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit community outreach organization dedicated to providing support to those affected by bullying, depression, or suicide. As a community outreach organization, the foundation organizes events, educational activities, and other public engagements aimed at increasing awareness to the effects of bullying, depression, and suicide.

The foundation also staffs a 24/7 Support Hotline "where individuals dealing with these issues can call and speak to directly to volunteers that will listen, that will not judge them," Martin says. The hotline will provide callers with resources.

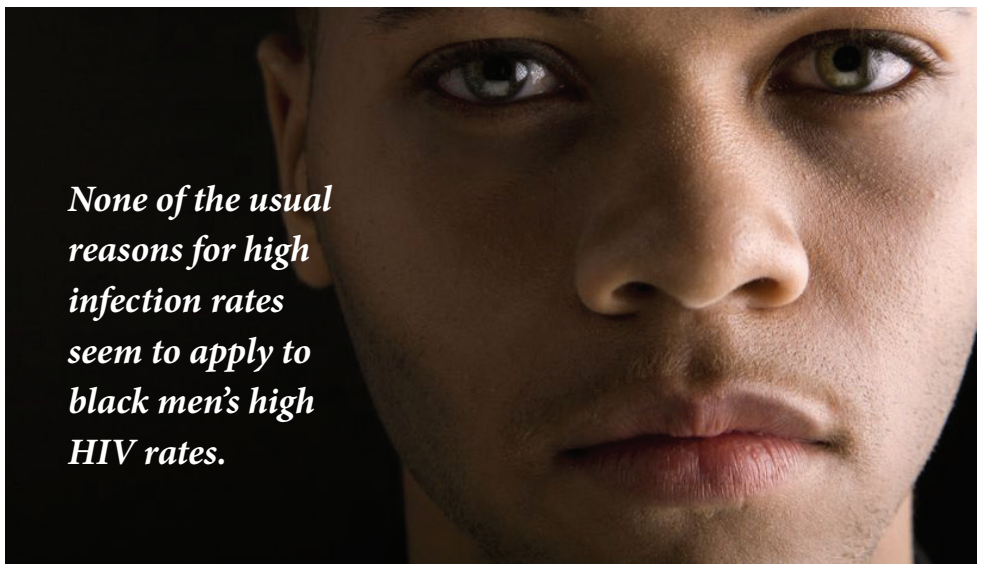
The foundation's volunteer board is Gantt, CEO/Founder; Martin, President; Elizabeth Welshans, Vice President; Adam Hagerty, Secretary; Carrie Fowler, Marketing*; and Steve Lantz, Volunteers.*

Hotline: 1 (855) HOPE-611 Facebook - www.facebook.com/foundationforhopeinc



Everyone needs a "safe space" if dealing with bullying, depression or suicide

Perfect Storm: In 30 years, 70% of 20-yr-old Black Gay Men HIV+



Lucas Grindley of HIV Plus magazine reports an alarming statistic: If nothing changes, the federal government estimates that in 30 years, 70% of 20-year-old black gay men will have HIV. That jarring statistic was presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the 2013 National Gay and Lesbian Task Force conference.

But what is driving that rate of infection — the highest of any demographic group — has so far puzzled researchers.

Studies find that black gay men aren't any more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior than their white peers. So simply ignoring condoms doesn't explain it. The same goes for other risk factors. Black gay men are actually less likely to use drugs before or during sex, for example.

The White House's top researcher on this topic, Greg Millett, senior policy adviser in the Office of National AIDS Policy, analyzed seven studies from Canada, 13 from the U.K., and 174 from the U.S., and found that black men who have sex with men (MSM) were no more likely than other gay or bisexual men to have unprotected sex. And despite societal problems, such as the fact that black men face higher rates of unemployment than other races or are less likely to graduate from high school, the analysis points out that black gay men are actually 40 percent more likely to do simple protective things like wear a condom during sex. The results of the analysis were published in The Lancet in 2012 and presented at that year's International AIDS Conference.

Then in 2013, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention analysis of four studies noted that black MSM had fewer unprotected sexual encounters than white MSM—an average of three for receptive sex and six for insertive over six months for black men, compared with 11 and 12, respectively, for whites.

None of the usual reasons for high infection rates seem to apply to black men's high HIV rates. So a recent study from researchers at Northwestern University looked carefully at a theory that might explain what's happening.

Researchers have long wondered whether black gay men are dating within a smaller social network.

The Northwestern research team asked 143 gay and bisexual men, all single or non-monogamous, to keep a diary of all their sexual activity for 12 weeks. The men tracked what they had done and whether it was with someone of the same race. Like previous research, it indicated black gay and bisexual men were no more likely to have unprotected sex than others. But they were 11 times more likely to have sex with black men.

Researchers have long wondered whether black gay men are dating within a smaller social network. This study seems to confirm that idea. Among black MSM, 45 percent of sexual encounters were with other black men. By comparison, Latino MSM had their largest percentage of encounters with white men.

Although white men were the most likely to have sex with those of the same race, accounting for 56.7 percent of encounters, the study points out the obvious—that the pool of black gay men is much smaller than that of white gay men. A 2012 study by the Williams Institute and pollster Gallup found that African-Americans and other minority groups were more likely to identify as LGBT than white people, but it's still a smaller pool.

The Northwestern researchers published their findings, "Racial Differences in Same-Race Partnering and the Effects of Sexual Partnership Characteristics on HIV Risk in MSM: A Prospective Sexual Diary Study," in the *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes* in 2013.

Still, if black gay men are no more likely than others to engage in risky sexual behavior, it shouldn't much matter who they are having sex with. The study's principal investigator, Michael Newcomb, an assistant professor at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, considers condom use crucial.

"That's still the best way to protect oneself," he says, but when your network of sex partners is small and at higher risk to begin with, "your risk of acquiring HIV would be higher." Eventually the risk rate would "overwhelm" protection, Newcomb adds, because everyone in the network isn't perfect about condom use and other forms of protection.

The researchers concluded that a single case of HIV in a small social network "would allow HIV to penetrate the networks of black MSM," and it would travel through the network, infecting these men "more efficiently" than it would white men, for example.

Although their study didn't address this possible explanation, the researchers wondered if young black men who got into monogamous relationships were abandoning condoms. Young black men, for example, are more likely to have unprotected sex with older partners, which is statistically more risky than unprotected sex with younger partners.

"It may be that black MSM are aware that they are at increased risk for acquiring HIV," they wrote. "Subsequently, they may be using certain sexual partnership characteristics, including familiarity with partners, as indicators of HIV risk." That would be "a poor indicator when making decisions about condom use," researchers warned, because "the majority of new HIV infections occur in the context of these types of main, serious, or repeated partners."

The study doesn't address why black gay men have a smaller network of sexual partners in the first place. Likely there are many reasons. But there is one preventative measure researchers agree upon.

"I think what this and other studies indicate, on an individual level, [is that] the safest way to protect oneself is to use condoms constantly during anal sex. But we know that approach alone isn't solving the problem," says Newcomb. "So there are more structural and societal things that need to happen."

Working to reduce poverty and the infrastructure problems that come with it for neighborhoods, reducing racism, and specifically fighting racism among LGBT people would likely expand the sexual network of young black gay men, Newcomb says.

The Northwestern study considered the tightly knit network as just one of a series of factors at play. And the analysis presented by the White House's Millett leaned toward the likelihood that society's structural inequities could account for the disparity in infection rates. HIV-positive black gay men are three and a half times more likely to make less than $20,000 in annual income, are 50 percent less likely to have access to health insurance, and are less likely to visit health care providers than are white gay men.

The Lancet's analysis points out that young black gay men also have a 65 percent greater chance of becoming sexually active early in life than their white peers, and they have an 82 percent greater risk of childhood sexual abuse. It's a long list of hurdles for black gay and bi men to overcome. "There are all of these issues that unfortunately come together in a perfect storm," Millett says.

Prevent HIV Infection before Sex with New Method Available in Region

Known as PrEp - or Pre-exposure Prophylactic - a new method of preventing HIV infection with an existing HIV medication is now available in the region. FDA-approved, the method involves taking Truvada as prescribed under medical supervision.

Truvada has long been established as a successful agent, when combined with other HIV medicines, to treat HIV infection. The PrEP method involves taking the medicine before sex in order to prevent infection.

Are you PrEped? Is this HIV prevention method for you?

Learn more about this new and effective HIV prevention strategy and determine if it's right for you at Alder Health Services, Harrisburg, 100 N. Cameron St., Ste. 301-East and Alder Health Services, Lancaster, 1891 Santa Barbara Dr., Ste. 104.

For more information, call 1-800-867-1550.

Health Studies Lag Behind

Michael A. Fuoco of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* recently reported that The National Institutes of Health funded only a negligible number of studies researching the health of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people over more than two decades, according to an analysis led by the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.

Because of that, health inequities in that population continued unabated, according to a recent study published in the American Journal of Public Health.

The findings showed there were 628 NIH-funded studies of LGBT health between 1989 and 2011, representing only one-half of 1 percent of all NIH-funded studies. The majority of the LGBT studies focused on HIV/AIDS and other sexual health matters. When those studies were excluded, there were only 113 LGBT-related studies, or 0.1 percent of NIH-funded studies during the time period.

The study notes more research is clearly needed because, in general, LGBT people experience disproportionate behavioral risks and psychosocial health problems, and higher chronic disease risk factors than their non-LGBT counterparts.

"I can't say what number [of LGBT-related studies] there should be, but we should have research until disparities dissipate or are eliminated," said Robert W.S. Coulter, the study's lead author and a doctoral student in Pitt Public Health's Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences.

About 3.5 percent of the U.S. adult population is estimated to be gay, lesbian or bisexual, according to recent research based on national- and state-level population surveys, according to Mr. Coulter.

He noted that LGBT people suffer stigma associated with their sexual and gender minority status. Additionally, some subgroups use alcohol and tobacco and suffer obesity at higher rates than non-LGBT people; experience more violence among youths, including bullying and cyberbullying; have more mental health problems; and have higher rates of chronic disease such as cardiovascular disease and cancer. Moreover, they experience more stress from being a minority and can experience and internalize more victimization, he said.

The study found that during the time frame examined there were 202 NIH-funded projects on the development, implementation or evaluation of interventions for LGBT health issues. When intervention studies concerning HIV and other sexual health matters were removed, the number of projects dropped to 21.

"I think it's important to note the lack of funding for LGBT issues perpetuates these health inequities," Mr. Coulter said. "NIH is the world's largest funder of health research. Without them on our side, I don't think it's possible to eliminate these health disparities."

The paper notes that the "political climate" has had a chilling effect on such research, particularly after Republican members of Congress questioned in 2003 nearly 200 projects involving LGBT or other marginalized populations. More than half of the researchers in those studies removed words from proposals such as "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual" and "AIDS" while others completely dropped their projects and NIH funding for such projects declined.

"The political climate does have an effect. The NIH should be promoting, encouraging and stimulating research on LGBT issues," the paper said.

Betty Hill, executive director of the Persad Center, a human service organization serving the region's LGBT community, said the lack of NIH-funded research for LGBT people wasn't surprising to her.

"While there are a multitude of health problems, the only one that gets attention, albeit miniscule, is the HIV-AIDS issue. This is certainly a population whose health inequities should be studied to determine what to do to help," she said. "You don't know the right thing to do to help if you don't know what's happening.

"But in spite of the fact there are significant health disparities, it gets so little attention. What can account for that besides homophobia? What else could it be?"

The study suggests the NIH more efficiently stimulate research projects on LGBT health issues by doing the following:

• Establish policies that designate LGBT people as priority populations for research that goes beyond HIV/AIDS and sexual health issues.

n Increase evidence-based intervention research to improve LGBT and reduce health inequities.

• Explore new strategies to increase the amount of LGBT health research, including support for diversity among researchers.

• Support efforts to expand the pool of trained researchers prepared to propose LGBT research projects through training grants, fellowships, career awards and the establishment of LGBT Centers of Excellence.

"That certainly would be my wish list as well," Ms. Hill said. "This is a very important study. I hope it brings great awareness to the issue and puts pressure on the powers that be to invest in LGBT-related research."

HEALTH ALERT

LGBT in U.S. Spend $7.9 Billion Annually on Cigarettes

"It really is time for smoking to come out of the closet as the top issue health issue affecting LGBT people today," a leading LGBT health researcher recently told BuzzFeed. New statistics released alongside the 50th Anniversary Surgeon General's Report on Tobacco and Health reveal high costs of smoking within the nation's LGBT communities.

LGBT Americans spend more on cigarettes than all LGBT advocacy causes combined, according to new estimates provided by the Network for LGBT Health Equity. "It's a brutal truth," said Dr. Scout, the network's director, of the findings. "We're spending more on something that kills us than everyone else is spending to help us."

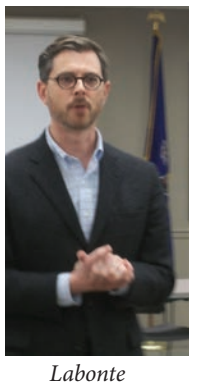
The statistics come just ahead of the release of the 50th Anniversary Surgeon General's Report on Tobacco and Health, which details the impacts of smoking. And while smoking is "far and beyond" the biggest health problem LGBT populations face, cracking down on smoking in these communities is often overshadowed by suicide and HIV prevention, Scout said.

"We've known this for a while, and we've been trying to convince people that it's a big deal," Scout said. "We [as a community] are actually good on health — we do a lot of stuff to make ourselves better. So, it's unusual that this part is missing from our narrative."

Nearly 33% of Americans who identify as LGBT smoke and, together, spend a whopping $7.9 billion on cigarettes each year — more than 65 times more than funders spend on all LGBT issues combined, according to the network's findings. In comparison, the Centers for Disease Control's 2012 National Adult Tobacco Survey showed that 19.5% of the U.S. population at large smokes.

But despite the startling figures, when some LGBT leaders are asked about the communities' top health issues, smoking is rarely on the list, Scout said. "It really is time for smoking to come out of the closet as the top issue health issue affecting LGBT people today."

Have You Enrolled in Health Care Yet?



Labonte

On Jan. 15 Christopher Labonte of Out2Enroll and the Sellers Dorsey Foundation on made a presentation on how health reform through the Affordable Care Act can improve access to health insurance for millions of Americans, including LGBT individuals and their families. He noted that nearly 70 percent of the LGBT community is unaware of their new options under ACA, such as federal premium subsidies for the purchase of coverage through the marketplace. In Pennsylvania, there is a total of 1.4 million uninsured residents. Program sponsors were the Central Pennsylvania Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, Alder Health Services, and Equality PA. The seminar was a collaborative project of the Sellers Dorsey Foundation, Center for American Progress, and the Federal Agencies Project, formed to educate the LGBT community about ACA.

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Wanda Sykes appeared on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno

Wanda Sykes Speaks Out

By Central Voice

Two weeks before the start of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, actress and comedienne Wanda Sykes appeared on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* with a t-shirt from the Human Rights Campaign's *#LoveConquersHate* campaign.

The campaign aims to support Russia's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community which is being targeted by a hateful "anti-propaganda" law that prohibits public support for equality in the country.

"It's criminal what they're doing to the LGBT community in Russia," Sykes said during the interview. After joking about a number of reasons why she would not be traveling to Sochi for the Olympic Games, she added, "What I will do is wear a t-shirt to support them. Human Rights Campaign has a [shirt] out and the proceeds go to help them. And I brought you one too so if they ask you to go, you can say 'No I'm going to wear a t-shirt.'"

When *Central Voice* last talked to Sykes she had just successfully had a bilateral mastectomy. Sykes explained that while pursuing breast reduction last February until after the reduction lab work showed she had DCIS [ductal carcinoma in situ] in her left breast. "I was very, very lucky because DCIS is basically stage-zero cancer," Sykes said.

Sykes told *Central Voice* she wasn't planning on doing a 'cancer show' while making appearances. Yet she's not shunning her disease. Embracing it is more apt. Her heart and soul and signature humor thrive. A few days after the Ellen Show, Sykes told the New York Daily News, "I had real big boobs, and I just got tired of knocking over stuff." She said, "Every time I eat … Oh, lord. I'd carry a Tide stick everywhere I go. My back was sore, so it was time to have a reduction."

Within every front stage persona lives a backstage individual.

Sykes shared with *Central Voice* why, as outspoken as she is in the public arena, why she wasn't talking about her cancer sooner. "I needed to be there for myself, to use my own healing energy," she said. As word leaked and Twitter alerted others to her challenge, well wishers sent messages. And then in a voice as genuine as warm apple pie Sykes said, "People like me. That's sweet."

And then right back to her signature humor.

"How many things could I have? I'm black, then lesbian. I can't be a poster child for everything!" she joked. "At least with the LGBT issues we get a parade, we get a float, it's a party." Sykes' breast cancer was anything but a party but her humorous soul has shone through the hardship.

Exploring San Fran's SoMa District *continued from page 24*

Nearby, the massive 1015 Folsom (1015.com) nightclub has some highly popular circuit-style parties and raves - check the calendar for details. Cat Club (sfcatclub.com) is another cool dance space with different theme nights, many with a strong queer following - Throwback Thursdays and Wednesday's Bondage A-Gogo are two of the city's better midweek clubbing adventures.

Where to Stay in SoMa

Across the street from the Ferry Terminal Building, the sleek and contemporary Hotel Vitale (hotelvitale.com) is part of the stylish Joie de Vivre chain; many of its airy rooms overlook the bay, and there's a great little urban spa on-site. Just a block away and occupying part of a historic YMCA building, the Harbor Court (harborcourthotel.com) is one of two SoMa members of the gay-popular, San Francisco-based Kimpton brand. This 131-room property has a large ground-floor "living room" off the lobby with a fireplace and plenty of comfy armchairs - it's a lovely spot to while away an afternoon. The design-driven W San Francisco (wsanfrancisco.com) rises 31 stories above Yerba Beuna Gardens, its rooms chockfull of cushy amenities, and its TRACE restaurants drawing a see-and-be-seen crowd for drinks and dining.

One of the better deals in the neighborhood, the gay-popular Mosser Victorian (themosser.com) is a smartly renovated redbrick beauty right in the heart of the neighborhood. Next door is Kimpton's other SoMa property, the dapper Palomar San Francisco (hotelpalomar-sf.com), which has a decidedly plush and modern vibe, its rooms outfitted with gourmet minibars and iPod docks.

Down closer to gay nightlife are several mid-range chain properties, the best of which are the Holiday Inn San Francisco-Civic Center (ihg.com) and the retro-decorated Best Western Plus Americania (americaniahotel.com). Next to the latter, the arty, eco-conscious, and still reasonably priced Good Hotel (thegoodhotel.com) is, indeed, a good place to lay your head for the night. Strictly for those on a tight budget, the dive-y but economical (rates start under $100) San Francisco Inn (www.sanfranciscoinn.com) is a bare-bones motel with free parking that works well in a pinch. And you can't beat the location for SoMa nightlife - it's right by the Stud nightclub and less than three blocks from most of the other gay clubs in the neighborhood.

Andrew Collins produces the site GayTravel.About.com and contributes to many other travel magazines and websites.

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